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“Territory Trouble”: Feminist Studies and (the Question of) Hospitality

*A*s an echo of the paper I gave at the 2013 International Springtime of Gender conference in Paris, this essay is an attempt to visit the field of feminism through the issue of hospitality. I first recognized the relevance of this approach while organizing in Geneva, along with Cynthia Kraus, meetings with and around the work of Judith Butler.¹ We were her hosts, and she was our guest. Like the International Springtime of Gender, the Geneva event raised questions of hosting and translating. Translation, exchange, appropriation, interpretation, and acculturation are all elements that commonly characterize scholarly meetings; however, something else was at play that involved feminist thought in a novel fashion. What if hospitality were essential to the idea of feminism? How could this potentiality be put to work and made productive as a resource?

I will focus, first, on what feminist thought and action have done and are doing to the social and political orders. The metaphor of *hospitality* is a way to question the inextricably linked domestic, public, and territorial issues at play. The figures of the outsider and of disorder raise questions of welcoming and rejecting; they question the nature of “our” feminist

engagement and “our” Westernness. Following Jacques Derrida, the idea is to progress from rejecting to welcoming, from the language of law to speaking up and, with Donna Haraway, from the idea of sudden emergence, of speaking as an individual, to the question of figuration and coalition. Hospitality raises questions of language and territory, of the intimate and the enemy, and is thus a good concept for universalizing feminist proposals and revealing what they disrupt in the domestic and national order of the political sphere.

After highlighting some of the promises and universalities of feminist thought, I will, in the more local context of French contemporary society, examine the inhospitable situation in which “women” subjects, homosexual subjects, and colonial or migrant subjects have been and are still positioned. The idea is not so much to address these questions in detail (they are too vast to comprehend) as to insist on their inextricably linked social, political, and epistemic dimensions. This will provide an opportunity for three narratives from *within* France, where knowledge and politics intermingle: 1) the history of the French historical tradition and its inhospitality toward gender studies and feminist issues—a question that, following other authors, I have recently addressed (Gardey, “L’histoire”); 2) the history of the situation of immigrants in a French (post-)colonial context and how the Republic, the nation, and alterity are revealed in that light—referring in particular to the work of Nacira Guénif-Souilamas; and 3) the renewed material and gendered history of parliamentarianism since the French Revolution and of the domestic nature of the political in a context of Western democracy—based here on my own recent historical work (Gardey, *Le linge*). The idea is thus to bring together the inhospitality of historical reason and knowledge, the definition of national and political territory, the production of the outsider and of otherness, and cultural features of democratic institutions in the French republican context.

In the third part of the essay, I question the facts and fictions of various feminisms as extraterritoriality. Is feminism a hospitable space? If so, for whom and on what conditions? If the history of feminism allows us to define it as a space for encounters and hospitality, what are the limits to this definition? Is what brought us together during the days of the International Springtime of Gender conference, and that continues in the editorial space provided here by *differences*, an unindexed space, an “international” or “transnational” space? Is it a Babel of sorts or a site that replays power relations and some unconsidered issues, in particular due to the domination of the English language and of a certain tendency to speak without considering

the locality that is constitutive of the North American era of production as a specific territory and culture?

Finally, “non-national” and “trans-Atlantic” became a resource, or even a survival condition, for feminist studies (for example, in the French-speaking world since the end of the 1980s), but the issue of finding ways to articulate these territories remains, whether they be disciplinary, national, and non-national, or epistemic and political. What may the virtues of the feminist field be in a context of strong cultural standardization and institutional transformations of the scientific and academic field? How can we conceive of our undertakings in the age of the h-index, of the ranking of individuals and institutions, of all-out competition, of the propagation of neoliberalism and managerialism in academia and research? What is the future of feminist thought, and can it be imagined independently from the “humanities” and the way they will go? Finally, as the framing of issues and the style of explanations are more and more of an extrasocial—and most often infrapolitical—nature (cognitive psychology, genetics, neurosciences, evolution theory, etc.), what forms of writing and types of resistance can we craft?² In the face of operators whose scope of action appears to be boundaryless, can feminist territories still exist as a land of asylum?

Feminist Promises

Raising the Issue of Hospitality, Troubling the Order of the “Home”

As Judith Butler recalled in her second introduction to *Gender Trouble*, “to make life possible,” which is one of her theoretical and political claims, could be seen as a means to invite persons who were “unauthorized” until then to move into a new life space, a new political and theoretical space, which could be defined as common ground (Gardey, “Définir”).³ It could be seen as defining a “home” in which to live and think, a “my place” that could also be “our place,” in a definition “at large,” as Donna Haraway would say (“Cyborgs”). It seems to me that this gesture, which Butler makes beautifully explicit, has been operating for forty years under the influence of the feminist movement and feminist thought. Increasing the number of subjects, expanding the range of possibilities, and redefining “homes” in terms of politics and science are among the mechanisms and motives of acting and thinking in most feminisms (Gardey, “Définir” 120).

In that sense, the social and political order is involved, as are science, philosophy, and academia. Admitting strange objects and subjects as guests (and not as enemies) through the doors of law, society, philosophy, scientific knowledge, and the university means transforming “the home order,” subverting its codes and norms. In the end, it is about redefining what *home* is or could be. Here, the idea of hospitality refers to the diversity of objects, subjects, and issues raised by feminist thought and theory.

Let us now focus on what is opened in the sense of “transforming the home order” by Butler’s work. Beyond feminism or queer thinking, in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Butler brings up hospitality in a wider social and political sense. *Precarious Life* is about the state, war, and the law. It deals with nomad subjects, foreigners, and those who are “in exile.” It talks about those who find themselves excluded from protective territoriality (including that of the state, where legitimate violence is also perpetrated). It deals with tolerance and liberality, with the ways of preserving and accepting difference(s); it is about fundamental rights, of “precarious lives” or “bare life” in Giorgio Agamben’s terms; it deals with protection and asylum.

From a historical perspective, the fact that this thinking originates from gender and sexual differences and the “right to live” of those who have long been described as “minorities” is significant. It is an unprecedented movement of hospitality and an overturning of what counts as the stigmata or the norm, the particular or the universal. The theoretical and political potential of these promises still remains to be explored (Haraway, “Promises”).

While hospitality defines a space and a situation, it also defines a certain type of relationship in which peoples, cultures, languages, and ideas are mutually obliged. It is the very definition of what occurs that is engaged and made more complex and uncertain. As Jacques Derrida writes: “The host who welcomes, the one who welcomes the invited guest, the welcoming host who believes himself the owner of the house is in reality a guest welcomed in his own home. He receives the hospitality that he offers in his own home, he receives hospitality from his own home—which ultimately does not belong to him. The host, as host, is a guest” (*Adieu* 41). Thinking of oneself as the ephemeral guest of one’s own house, conceiving a conditional presence that is conditioned by the relationship with others, would that not be a way to reformulate the order of knowledge and politics? What could be the promise of a territory thus made “other,” this territory under tension whose quality or value would depend on the quality and value of the relationship

with others? A “self” and a “home” whose interiority and privacy would be not abolished but rather fulfilled by this foundational “opening”? An “identity” that would thus be founded and redistributed by showing welcome? It is certainly interesting to think about the history of feminism, of what it has done and what it does to thinking and the world from that problematic angle, and about what is at play in terms of paradoxical relations. It would then be possible to explore its creative and universalizing potential.

Speaking Up, Showing a Figure, and Taking Position

Derrida’s words are neither ironic nor out of step with reality. Hospitality is about actual and abstract situations, possible and impossible experiences, and happy and unhappy situations. Derrida does not leave out violence. He gives it a central position since it is centrally unperceived. Here, language becomes essential. It is the language that one speaks that others speak. It is the language of law and rules that are written. Language can be primary violence. “The foreigner is first of all foreign to the *legal language* in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own.” This is where the question of hospitality begins for Derrida: “Must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country?” (*Of Hospitality* 15).

What language must one speak to be welcomed? What languages should be developed and maintained in order to exclude? Today’s legal language is cast in the language of economics. Like the Argentinians before them, the Greek people are well aware of that. But let us come back to the issue of language and what it implies in terms of hosting, empowerment, and agency. For the “woman subject,” for the “lesbian” or “queer subject,” for the “subaltern subject” (immigrant, aspiring migrant, minority with migrant or colonial ancestry), isn’t the question first and foremost that of the language he or she is asked to speak?

Women and other *others* have been and are “foreigners” in more than one respect. This is what makes Haraway’s use of Sojourner Truth’s soliloquy, of her amazing sermon, so strong. “Ecce Homo” is about the language that a black female slave can speak. It is about the act of speaking up itself. It is about the radical strangeness of a language that originates from physicality as a strength and as a *difference*. It is about what emerges and cannot be kept quiet because of the crushing experience of slavery and

beyond that experience, in spite of the *precariousness* of bodies and an almost *bare* life. It is about the conditions of enunciation. Engaging in language, making language take shape, making it emerge and happen in its absolute locality: is that a basic condition? Must that language, that voice, be made to confront the language of law, that of the (white) fathers and brothers? Must it be made, by its existence, its strange sound, and its disruptive syntax, to leave its mark and stigmatize the language of the home, to reveal the locality of the language of law, to highlight the fragility of “neutrality” as a *force for law* and universality, and to underscore the contingency of the domestic space as political space (Gardey, “Définir”)?

As Haraway suggests, a shift, a radical *opening*, is possible. Returning to Sojourner Truth, she asks: “Why does her question [Ain’t I a Woman?] have more power for feminist theory 150 years later than any number of affirmative and declarative sentences?” (“Ecce” 92). “For me, one answer to that question lies in Sojourner Truth’s power to figure a collective humanity without constructing the cosmic closure of the unmarked category. Quite the opposite, her body, names, and speech—their forms, contents, and articulation—may be read to hold promise for a never settled universal” (92).

The option is not posthumanist but humanist: “How can humanity have a figure outside the narratives of humanism?” asks Haraway. Her plea is in favor of new and feminist humanism *hic et nunc*. It is a utopian quest for a new and possible figuration: “How do we figure ‘feminist humanity?’” she adds (95). Working on the “eccentric and mobile” figures of new “imagined humanity,” to use de Lauretis’s words from “Queer Theory,” Haraway rejects the idea of a consistent subject as origin but seeks a “common language” for what Butler calls new “connections” or new “coalitions” (“Sexual”). The figure of Christ as a figure of dislocation and suffering serves as a point of entry in “Ecce Homo.” Haraway speaks of blasphemy and expectation (Gardey, “Reading” 88). She also speaks of *critique*. But how to proceed with critique and blasphemy without falling into intolerance? “Is critique secular?”, ask Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler, and Saba Mahmood. How can we give life to a public space where free speech and hospitality coexist? Isabelle Stengers’s intuition in her comment on Haraway is that critique as blasphemy does not relinquish a certain form of expectation.⁴ It is in that sense that it produces utopia, that is, an imaginary and real territory.

As we can see, defining this *common space*, this *topos* (this “home”?), means agreeing on the languages that are spoken within it and

on what forms an individual (or collective) subject. The questions of subject, law, identity, and name are connected by the question of the question, or the “address.” What is this about? It is, in fact, about interrogation, the paranoia that now bears the name of “security.” It is the obsession with names that sets out and sets apart and, at the same time, puts forward and includes. Derrida asks, “Does hospitality consist in interrogating the new arrival? [. . .] Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double erasure: that of the question *and* the name?” He continues, “Does one give hospitality to a subject? to an identifiable subject? to a subject identifiable by name? to a legal subject?” (*Of Hospitality* 29).⁵

Or should we not give up the obsession with the question and instead engage in the social and political experience of opening, of welcoming *precarious lives*, to use Butler’s words? As we can see, the questions of territory and borders are essential.

The Past and Present of Inhospitability

Producing Knowledge in Inhospitable Territory: The Case of History in France

The question of the hospitality and inhospitability of national, social, and political territories, of the legal and actual treatment of individual and collective subjects, is of course linked to the way knowledge defines the boundaries of its own territory and the subjects that are relevant and legitimate within them. Playing a role in knowledge, becoming a producer of science, is a historical issue on which many feminist (and nonfeminist) women researchers have provided long narratives, filled with obstacles, within the different theoretical and practical fields of knowledge.⁶ Bringing “outside” knowledge into science is another story, often related to the first; such is the extent to which the social and cultural conditions of knowledge production determine its conditions of exercise and happiness. The social history of science has highlighted the highly historical, nonlinear, and equivocal nature of what is considered relevant to the order of the home or the laboratory,⁷ leisurely and amateur practice or scientific activity, and the world of the court and of monstration or demonstration.⁸ In this respect, it should be noted that some epochs are more hospitable than others in terms of scientific poaching. The very territory of what is and what makes science appears historically contingent and thus potentially open . . . or closed.

Awareness of the historicity of knowledge, of the influence of context on methods of inquiry and research objects, is sometimes lacking in the experience that academic disciplines have of themselves. Indeed, self-definition and the limits placed on certain approaches are common. They participate in the work that scientific fields continue to undertake in order to exist. In the case of history in France, rejection of feminism was as much about flesh and blood individuals as ideas and thought. The "home" of social and human sciences, the "home" of the Republic, of science, and of universality have thus kept the ship on course for a long time. There is a dual exclusion (in practice and in thought) that is inextricably epistemic *and* political. In the following paragraphs, I will focus on a few symptomatic examples of inhospitality in the territories of historians.

The first example is Jacques Poloni-Simard's article published in *CLIO* in 2002. *CLIO* is the young and only French journal of women and gender history, and Poloni-Simard is the editor of *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, the major history journal in France. Invited to report on the contribution of women and gender history to the historical field, he focuses on the (modest) *Annales* editorial policy regarding women and gender history, which he nevertheless judges positively. More interestingly, he clarifies what is "welcome" (and thus, conversely, what is less welcome) in the field by affirming several times what seems essential to him, which is "the definition or defense of a particular idea of social history." His words display an understanding of harmony and completeness: the history of women and gender cannot form a separate continent; it has a place as a component of social history on condition that it does not disrupt its "unity." The tone of the article is one of reserve and retreat, and it is tempting to wonder if the history of women and gender may be allowed to contribute only on condition of not being ambitious (in what it *is* and what it *does* to history). The idea (which is not new) seems to be that women's and gender history is useful if it is integrated (in reality, when it *integrates itself*)⁹ rather than if it opposes, and when it "adds complexity" rather than when it becomes an "exclusive criterion" (108). The history of women and gender may keep its seat at the grown-ups' table if it conforms to the rules that apply to the sharing of the cake: respecting the founding principles imposed by those (*male*) peers who are its hosts. Indeed, in the same article, others ("Blacks, Indians, outsiders, and therefore also women or, more recently, subalterns and homosexuals") are asked not to impose a history "based on ethnic, social or sexual criteria" (108).

Through this inventory, all types of studies (cultural, postcolonial, queer) beyond gender studies are suspected of disrupting "unity"

by “slicing” historical matter. Here, history sees itself, like that which is social (society? knowledge?), as a whole under threat of “fragmentation.” Paraphrasing Alain Badiou’s *De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?*, we are entitled to ask: What does *Unity* name? And what unity, and for what purpose? Why should social history remain united? United for whom, with whom, to conduct which types of projects and to exclude which others? The dramatic nature of what would happen if, by some mischance, such “unity” were disrupted is impressive, like a simple action that might be committed with consequences all the more disastrous for being unknown, eventually sweeping all away: History, its Unity, and Society—unless it were, in fact, Knowledge, the Republic, and eventually Mankind?

The second example is the journal *Genèses* and its cofounder, Gérard Noiriel, who published a book titled *Sur la “crise” de l’histoire* [*The Crisis of History*] at the end of the 1990s, which speaks of the same fear of “atomization,” “fragmentation,” and, eventually, the depreciation of history (113). Most of his argument consists of redefining history as a disciplined and methodical scientific community, at a distance from superfluous and sterile theorization. In the only section of his book dedicated to feminist history, Noiriel offers as an example of “sterile” the discussion between Joan W. Scott and Laura Lee Downs about social groups as “actual entities,” or entities resulting from the “discursive aspects of experience.”¹⁰ Here, too much discussion between feminists is said to harm the method, unity, and communicability of history (144–48).¹¹

In her review of Noiriel’s book, Scott points out certain contradictions in the author’s approach. To repeat and extend some of her comments: How can it be that Noiriel, who made a decisive contribution (I would be tempted to say as a result of his experience as an activist) in rewriting part of French national working-class history by working on the important but denied contribution of immigrants, became a scrupulous guard of the borders of what historical territory should and could be? As Scott writes, “Why does the historian feel authorized to criticize the Nation (using history against politics to produce change) and not the foundations of his own practices?” (“Border” 388). Later on, highlighting how Noiriel’s defense of the discipline is a plea against philosophy (or any form of excessive theorization), she questions this “border patrol” work and shows surprise at the fact that a historian of immigration can be in favor of the expulsion of philosophy in the name of the community of historians. Scott concludes by wondering whether it is desirable for those who work at the frontiers of knowledge to be asked to “assimilate or migrate” (“Border” 388).¹²

*Producing the Common in (Post)colonial Territory:
Immigrants from within France*

Assimilate or disappear is one of the injunctions made to the populations that Guénif-Souilamas studies. For many years, she has focused on the figure of "the emigrant" and on the experience of migration in the French postcolonial context. In her recent work, she questions the reality of colonialism's posterity by showing what persists of colonial relations in French society ("Altérités"). Her work offers a rich vision of France as nation-state and focuses in particular on the management of mass emotions, the production of a hegemonic discourse on emigrants, and how both constrain the policies that are implemented and those that are possible. This work takes various forms.

First, Guénif-Souilamas sheds light on the obliteration of the voices and actual life experiences of the French people who are continuously reassigned to their "foreign" origins: as Arabs, Muslims, Africans, former colonial subjects—subjects who are spoken about but whose own ability to speak is taken into account very little, if at all. The question of the subject of enunciation (and that of knowledge) is, in addition, brought up on a personal level by the author as a French-Algerian woman and as a sociologist (who loves literature and, above all, writing). She therefore questions the standards of sociological and academic literature, and the calls to order that are made to her on a scientific as well as a political level. Can the (Muslim) sociologist (of Algerian descent) speak? Should she let herself be trapped in the identity and role of the integrated migrant promoted through scholarly achievement? Should she still, as always, obey the orders to be impartial that constitute the foundation and form, the appropriate scientific ethos, of the sociologist? Can she be assimilated, professionally and socially, or does she disrupt the codes of the profession and the public space of what can be expressed?¹⁵ The biographical disruption is central in her more recent texts and continues in the vein of Harawayan fictions in the form of acting on and in the world.

In that respect, Guénif-Souilamas continues the work of undermining the good conscience of the Left undertaken with Éric Macé in *Les féministes et le garçon arabe* [*Feminists and the Arab Boy*]. In this seminal book, they highlight an essential social and political phenomenon that disturbs the feminist conscience in the form of the disqualification of Arab boys in the French suburbs or the attributing to young men of Arab origins a caricatured figure that is constantly reified. The book sheds light on the

mechanisms through which Arab boys have become the enemy from within. It uncovers this characteristic societal phenomenon even in the writings of some feminists: shouldn't young Arab girls (the *beurettes*, as they are commonly called)¹⁴ be saved from the "Arab boy"? Young men whose parents or grandparents were born in the Maghreb countries of Algeria, Morocco, or Tunisia, former French colonies, still suffer from permanent racialization and acute racism. These identity-based assignments and disqualifications are reworded today in the context of the anti-Muslim racism that developed in the West after September 11th. Kabyles and/or Christians, Arabs and/or Muslims, *beurs*, many of whom are French citizens, are kept in a subordinate condition, socially and politically experiencing subaltern citizenship on a daily basis. They are also reminded of their otherness, a difference that, it is said, cannot be assimilated, which is now expressed in the figure of the "Muslim."

In her work "L'altérité de l'intérieur" ("The Otherness from Within"), Guénif-Souilamas gives a more general outline of the contemporary characteristics of the (post)colonial French Republic. This essay deals with what it means to be constituted through constraint, acculturation, and norms imposed on those who can, have, and eventually "deserve" to be "French." It is about foundational unconscious and repeated structures and hidden or omitted skeletons. Guénif-Souilamas empties the closets of the nation. She shows how metaphors, ideas, concepts, theoretical resources, and/or ideological markers operate as reified elements that can be kept to hand and sorted out. She identifies the origin of a language that was established in the wake of the modification of the French nationality code in 1988, when a national doctrine of "integration" emerged. In a text titled in English translation "Liquidating Integration," she reviles the word and the concept: "Integration is not a tool of government or a measure of good government; it is one of the 'attributes' of the reigning president. It is not out of the picture for which it would provide an understanding; it is in the picture, and has become a quasi-fetishized object of figuration, to be considered as an indigenous category." She continues: "It is by weighing the political, normative, and yet human damage caused by this notion, which has become a watchword under the appearance of a European directive, that I have taken the measure of the damage caused by Europe's recolonization process that is hidden by this unassuming dirty word in the mouths of those who use and abuse it" ("Altérités" 191, my translation).¹⁵ Butler highlights the normative and real consequences of this model: "[I]n other terms, the model of social integration depends on what is 'unintegrated,' or should be 'disintegrated' in

order to maintain its hegemony. In that sense, social integration acts *against* substantial norms of equality and universality" (Report).

Finally, the work deals with this quality of (shared) territories and what produces and defines them *here and now*. With different biographical and linguistic crossroads (French and Arabic; French and English; writing and speaking), the territories covered by Guénif-Souilamas are defined from one coast to another, from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic. They include the relationship between center and periphery, between the lights of the capital and the working-class territories of Paris's northern suburbs in Seine-Saint-Denis. They take us from the metropolitan Paris area to the port of Marseilles by way of the streets and squares of Algiers. We thus find ourselves exploring physical, social, and psychological territories that are situated in between languages, between the settler and the colonizer, the dominant and the dominated, the universal and the particular, the black and the white, the Christian and the Muslim, the secular and the religious, the self and the other, and also history and the present. Guénif-Souilamas is interested in these territories for the very reason that the relationship between self and other is essential and inextricable. She thus helps to outline a surprising geography of contemporary worlds and to account for the way French society is, for example, interlocked in/with Algeria. Thus emerges modernity: territories that are always more complex and differently "other" than they seem at first, territories forever linked to this "other," the "outsider" who is yet an intimate part, territories that tend to delimit, contain, or deny, territories whose present substance is made of differentiated temporalities, inscribed or absent memories, and histories that have never been told yet are intensely vital.

*Producing the Universal in Male Territory:
Of Parliamentary Inhospitability*

Working with the concepts of the *domestic* (nation, home) and the *other* (foreigner, Arab, Muslim), Guénif-Souilamas opens up in a particularly enlightening manner a series of unthought issues, "black boxes," paradigms, and "ready-made thinking" that structure the French contemporary political landscape. While apparently distant from this subject, my recent research on the history of the Assemblée Nationale, the French lower chamber of parliament, surprisingly echoes this undertaking. A fortuitous link can be seen in the vocabulary used by the first legislators (those who came together to form the Constituent Assembly under the French Revolution). In

an attempt to delimit the perimeter of what forms the basis of the territory of their sovereignty, from the very first Assembly meetings, they regulated the access of outsiders (Poudra and Pierre). “Outsiders” must be understood here to be those who are not legislators (the king, the people, representatives of other authorities). As legal fictions and representative “bodies,” legislative assemblies had thus to perform normative and material work to delimit the territory wherein they deliberated, thus expressing the historically unprecedented form of their sovereignty (Gardey, *Le linge* 29). Producing a space for deliberation and representation thus inevitably meant regulating and producing a physical territory. This original self-designation (the “representatives”) and designation of the others (the “outsiders”) brings us back to the inextricable link between the history of Western democracies and the territorial and political expression of the nation.

More generally, my work addresses how unprecedented ideas and principles (popular sovereignty, the universal character of the emancipatory promise of the Revolution in its principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity) were written and inscribed on walls, in formal and material arrangements, in social and gendered plans. The inquiry into the administrative or “private” archives of the French Parliament allows a revisiting of the history of Western democratic institutions as historically contingent and situated spaces and an exploration of the mechanisms by which they produced universal elements in producing difference and otherness. This anthropological study offers a new perspective on the long history, now well documented, of the exclusion of women from democracy in the French context. As masculine institutions in many respects, parliamentary assemblies substituted the body of the king with the “empty” and neutralized body of masculine representatives representing universality (Lefort 28). Democratic achievement was thus based on the actual repression of the “feminine,” of emotions (in the sense of mass emotions) under the dual form of the crowd (the people) and the aristocracy (women and children of royal houses and high-ranking families).¹⁶ Removed from the deliberative and sovereign space and the centrality of the political scene, things feminine were confined to the role of witness. To the exclusion of women from citizenship, the Republican parliamentary scenography added a specific “gendered architecture.”¹⁷ The masculinity of the parliamentary territory was enhanced by the definition of masculine grouping spaces around the Chamber (bar, hall of arms, salons), while the ladies were invited to contemplate the parliamentary scene from the boxes and galleries. The parliamentary theater took the architectural and social form of the theater itself and operated on

accepted gender asymmetries: looking and being seen; speaking up and listening; representing and witnessing; being active or passive (Gardey, *Le linge* 41). This rendering contingent of the feminine is one of the tricks that came with the simultaneous and paradoxical production of the body of representation as a “body-less” body, neutral and universal while at the same time a masculine and bourgeois *corporation*.

The use of the territory and the gendered economy that it encompassed, however, was established and produced effects beyond the Chamber itself. My work, in fact, sheds light on the long-term inhospitality of the territory of French parliamentary assemblies (and in particular in the Republican context) for any feminine presence. Thus, from the point of view of a “politics of presence” (Phillips), it is not only that women were not present because they were not represented (and could not exercise citizenship) in the French democratic and republican context until 1945 (and beyond), but the whole “domestic” territory of the National Assembly appeared hostile toward any feminine presence, whether as elected officials or public servants. Archival analysis reveals the first domestic and familial dimensions of the Assembly’s administration throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in spite of the production of a Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy. These elements of tradition (recruiting of loyal and indebted staff drawing on families of public servants over several generations) are characteristic of the *ancien régime* and are continued into the twentieth century, enabling the establishment and the stabilization of the parliamentary institution. Side effects such as the fixing of traditions and their reproduction in fundamental structures gave this major institution of the French Republic (and democracy) its lasting “aristocratic” and “domestic” features.

Just as they were not allowed to “represent” in the sense of parliamentarianism, women (except for a few wives and widows of public servants working as linen maids) could not serve the parliamentary institution. In this regard, the culture of the Assembly’s administration seems to have lagged behind changes witnessed in public and state administrations, where feminization and the access of women to higher ranks started earlier, in the last third of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, respectively, with controversial yet real access to positions as copywriters in the Ministries. The first office workers were recruited in the Assembly only on a temporary basis at the beginning of the twentieth century. Until the 1960s, no women worked in the Plenary Hall. After the refusal to integrate as a public servant a young woman who had passed the very difficult competitive examination for stenographer of debates, a job

that is performed at the heart of the parliamentary arena and consists of taking notes of interventions and discussions to provide the official account of legislative proceedings, a claim was filed in 1972 before the State Council against the National Assembly for discrimination and noncompliance with the act on gender equality in public service (Gardey, “Scriptes” 207). Over the long history of the Fourth and Fifth Republics, the “weaker sex” remained de facto banned from the lower chamber, whether as elected members of parliament or as public servants.¹⁸ The history of the National Assembly is thus that of a long-term constitutional and regulatory exception with regard to the texts that established gender equality in the wake of World War II within an Assembly whose liberty and sovereignty had been reconquered at great cost.

In bringing up the strictly political order that determined the “domestic in the political” aspect of a major institution in the history of Western democracy, in showing that the political included a domesticity that was dependent on certain social and gendered relations, my purpose is to qualify the matter and content of democratic institutions. In relation to the ongoing issue of women’s political rights, of the genuine universalization of voting rights and representation, my work narrates the singular (conceptual and material) history of the territory of parliamentary assemblies, durably empty of feminine presence. The narrative I offer questions what actually lies behind the gender order in the French National Assembly and asks if another, more equal ecology could prevail today, that is, if a more hospitable parliament could be produced in terms of gender as well as diversity in culture and origin.

Presence and the Possibility of an Alternative Territory

The Politics of Hospitality versus the Politics of Domination in Feminist Territories

The three narratives above account for a specific arrangement the effects of which were lasting. They shed light on the origin and permanence of some overlooked elements and how these limit the range of possibilities. The present undertaking, about a country in which I live and work, does not mean that other countries (for example, the United States) and other models of democratic development do not deserve their own critique. There is no model that prevails; there are only forms of social and political lives that happen and on which we can base our thinking about alternatives.

In an enduring inhospitable domestic (or national) context, a transnational space has served as a resource and refuge to keep alive feminist research and contributions. But the costs of transaction and recognition have persisted. Just as she does not become “integrated” by being “disciplined,” the historian of women and gender cannot become integrated by being “undisciplined,” in particular when she intends, by poaching in foreign territories, to achieve emancipation from the paternalist and corporatist yoke of discipline.

The cost of access to another territory is incurred by anyone who wants access to it. She must learn the language, the habits, and customs, be socialized into certain ways of thinking and writing, and submit to certain mandatory norms and references. We must bear in mind the obvious limits of this feminist “extraterritoriality” in terms of hospitality. Feminist studies are not as cosmopolitan as one might think. They do not necessarily value cultural and linguistic differences in themselves. The time and space of these encounters—the time of the International Springtime of Gender that is now extended, written about, and inscribed in *differences*—seem to be that of productive diversity. The “spring” of feminism wants to be a “spring” of language and writing. Resisting the power of a single language, resisting what writing in a language implies in terms of formal habits and thought, and resisting also specific experience seem essential today. To stay alive, thought must remain plural. It has to be written with the intimacy and abundance of a native language, through exchange and proximity with other languages and the experience of loss and transformation produced by the fact of writing in a language other than one’s own. Plurivocality, plurilocality are the price to pay for balanced exchanges, the quality of what makes a relationship, relationality. To me, defining what is common seems to depend on such an ecosystem. A politics of languages, that is, of the space left or not for alternatives and differences, should be considered an objective and an ardent obligation of the feminist field.

Beyond language, there is the question of feminisms’ social and cultural diversity and how these open up and are opened to third parties. The history of the feminist field is not free from power relations and internal struggles. The expansion of feminist voices and subjects raises the question of borders, of the center and the fringe, of the included and the allies. What about the tolerance of other contributions and approaches, other subjects and thoughts in exile, or disturbing proposals?

As we know, feminism is not isolated from the world or social relationships. It is a space of friction and conflict, which are for the most

part productive. The history of feminism is Western in the sense that it may be defined as a historically and culturally situated narrative. The critique is constantly repeated and renewed that feminism has accompanied and served cultural and political agendas such as colonialism. Colonial and North/South relationships, the issue of the religious and the secular, and the ways and promises of emancipation are all friction points in theory and practice. There are several options behind what is done today “in the name of feminism.”

This matters for more recent developments. The “cause” of women is a resource that can be used by its enemies. Think about the rejection of the right to abortion for U.S. women by those who simultaneously used the suffering of Afghan women to legitimate the U.S. use of military force in their country.¹⁹ Who speaks in the name of feminism and for what purpose? What is geostrategically and militarily at stake in this mobilization of feminism? How could the war in Afghanistan be justified “in our name”?²⁰ What is our responsibility in this name that seems to be ours and is thus engaged? The issue here is that of a pure politics of domination. Can we allow a “women’s rights” kit to be brought in soldiers’ suitcases or in the luggage of the NGOs that follow them? In what future disasters will we have to answer for our joint responsibility?

A Constrained Territory?

“Feminist” Thought in a Neoliberal Context

This corruption illustrates the constraints that we are now facing in terms of both action and thought. It reminds us of the way our knowledge is produced, the arenas that make it possible, and the norms to which academic circles must conform. Obtaining independence for feminism as a field of knowledge was first the object of a power struggle within the feminist movement—before it became a (particularly long-lasting, if we consider the French context) battlefield in the academic and scientific institutions of individual countries. The admission of feminist critique in the institutionalized space of the university was considered in its time a sign of irremediable depoliticization. This debate, which divided activists and academics in the 1970s and 1980s, was accompanied by other transformations, such as the institutionalization of part of the feminist program. *Gender mainstreaming* transformed political content and agendas,²¹ the nature of the questions raised (in terms of struggle and action), and the forms and instruments to achieve them. For forty years, national and international institutional practices in the varied fields of public, social, and environmental policies, along

with the politics of knowledge, have undergone deep transformations or have deeply transformed the space of legitimate questions and the framing of what renders them interesting or useful.

In addition to this practical and institutionalized integration and dissemination of feminist thought (for better and sometimes for worse), standardization has been imposed by the constraints characteristic of the contemporary academic game. The operating conditions of academic markets tighten the noose, reduce the range of possibilities, and shape methods of inquiry; they legitimate objects and forms of knowledge and ways to “do science” on feminist grounds. Ongoing neomanagerial transformations in the academic world over several decades have had an influence on individuals and teams. Productivism, “assessmentitis,” and utilitarianism are only a few of our contemporary diseases. The ways research is funded and the general organization of competition between institutions, teams, and individuals are behind the standardization of objects, methods, contents, and ways of writing and thinking. They result in mandatory references and citations within the field of feminist studies itself.

Bibliometric indicators that have proliferated for the past two decades are the best possible example of the penetration of rationales from benchmarking and knowledge management in the academic and scientific worlds.²² It should be recalled that these indicators are constructions with multiple biases and limitations. One such limitation, for example, is the favoring of the English language. Journals and norms of academic production are first and foremost Anglo-Saxon and only marginally “international.”²³ Cultural domination and the asymmetry of power relations, plus all out competition of all against all, and the standardization of activities and products are the dominant traits of the epoch. In many respects, academics become workers like any other and share their experience of violent exchange in the neoliberal context.

The question of *freedom*, then, becomes essential—freedom in the use of one’s time, in the way of working and writing, but also in collaborating and being held accountable to others, one’s epoch, and contemporaries. Where will the desire to be recognized as “worthy knowledge”—in the sense of being legitimately worthy of being recognized and exercised as knowledge—lead us? This is a shared question today. It concerns all humanities and social sciences. Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers make the following ironic comment: “Knowledge worthy of the name must not fear assessment, we are told, and this assessment has to be objective: how many articles, published in which journals? How many contracts?

How many collaborations with other highly prestigious institutions, thus contributing to the ‘positioning’ of the university on the European and world market?” (11).

Escaping these mapped, indexed, objectified, and “commensurated” territories is undoubtedly a primary obligation as are recovering spaces of freedom and promoting free, marginal, and hybrid zones. In my opinion, we have an obligation to resist, in writing, in our objects, methods, ways of life, and in comparing experience and knowledge outside and within the academic space. In this respect, the uncertain, nebulous, disorderly, or undisciplined character of the feminist field, and in particular its emphasis on *other* experience and knowledge, is most valuable and should continue to be promoted. This space should keep open and in conflict (keep unresolved) the political and epistemic questions that inhabit it. Hospitality must be the rule. Spaces for encounter between approaches in different languages, about social and political situations that may be similar or distant, unique or common across geographic and cultural territories, are still insufficiently developed. We need to take advantage of the richness of these confrontations. We must keep on doing science “in a different manner,” promoting unpredictable, meaningfully *strange* encounters.²⁴ It is our duty not to let ourselves be consumed by deathly accounting obligations. We have to clarify under what conditions we want to become real players in the game and to participate in setting its rules: as insiders, as outsiders, or by adopting a hybrid “third space,” an other space in the way we define what science could or must be.

*Deterritorialization, Agency, and
New Political/Epistemic Worlds*

The well-established questions of feminism, postfeminism, and posthumanism have been discussed at length within and beyond the feminist field, and the emphasis in my conclusion may not be, exactly, on what is at play in these discussions. We can recognize the promises of Rosi Braidotti’s decisive move when she claims: “The central concern for my nomadic subject is that there is a noticeable gap between how we live—in emancipated or postfeminist, multiethnic globalized societies, with advanced technologies and high-speed telecommunication [. . .]—and how we represent to ourselves this lived existence in theoretical terms and discourses” (4). If, in her words, “globalization” is about “the mobilization of differences and the deterritorialization of social identity” and challenges the “hegemony of

nation-states and their claim to exclusive citizenship” (5), the question of how to act *from* and *in* a certain location (or territory?) remains—as does the question of the territorial and political frame in which political agency might be enacted. Confronted by the strength of capitalism, described by Braidotti as a “nomadic force” able to control space-time mobility in highly selective ways, could we oppose the sole force of the “nomadic subject”? Becoming nomadic doesn’t enhance empowerment in a persistent nation-state territorial context. Becoming emancipated is not an easy move in a neoliberal context where the autonomy of individual people and that of crucial institutions (such as the law or the public sphere) is subsumed in solely economic rationalities (see Brown). The future of the individual and collective subject depends on the opportunity that we happen to have to speak in the name of and about what is social, to uphold the social issues that are ours. It depends also on our capacity to define and invent new sovereign territories *from* which and *in* which to act. The very nature of the “new” territories that compose our present world (and define our present relation to the world) should be interrogated. The quest is both epistemological and political, as Haraway prophesied.

My last observation is on the joint demonetization of humanistic knowledge and of collective action in the contemporary world. Humanistic knowledge is confronted by its own internal critics and its lesser capacity to be heard and to operate. The loss of agency of most institutions and political stakeholders (in the context of Western democracies) under the reign of economic reason and the deterritorialized deployment of its own agency is an unprecedented event in the history of capitalism. What can institutions (even if they are coordinated, like the European institutions) do against the powerful forces of markets if not simply accompany them? How can one not see that in spite of the continuous changes in initiatives and coalitions, the market presides over and deeply transforms our lives, independently of any democratically coordinated or socially organized effort? For its objective is also and precisely to dismantle the socially and politically instituted chosen forms of life (Brown).

If we were right to criticize the humanistic program, then the recognition of the historical limitation of its emancipatory content postulated on humanist principles and linked to the deployment of “universal” scientific practices has both political and epistemological implications. Like the political, the theoretical seems disarmed. Conversely, other “reasons” or *épistémès* are highly valued and concretely able to perform and transform the world. Economics, behavioral psychology, and neurosciences are some

of them. That the world may be described as postmodern or not makes no substantive difference. On the other hand, the colonization of our humanist (social and natural) worlds calls for the redefinition and recolonization of what counts as a territory *from* which and *in* which to act.

Economism, with its old, seemingly endless alliances, is a recurring threat to the definitions of what makes knowledge and what makes society. A double struggle is thus certainly taking place in the territory of lived realities as well as in those of thought and thinkable realities. New forces must be deployed to analyze and thwart the colonizing expansion of extrasocial explanatory registers of the social, such as cognitivist psychology, evolution theory, all-out genetics, and neurosciences. In her essay, “Sex, Cash, and Neuromodels of Desire,” Isabelle Dussauge talks about “the lost and found social of neuroscience” (445). She insists on the behaviorist origins of “reward”—an intrinsically economic metaphor—and on the role it plays in neuroscientific experimental productions. “What kind of story of human action is being told through the figure of the reward system of the brain? What happens to economy, sex, and pleasure when framed as rewards?” she asks (“Valuation” 250). Far away from psychoanalytical theories that work with the complex notions of desire and pleasure, disciplines such as neuroeconomics, the neurobiology of addiction, and the neuroscience of sex or evolutionary psychology propose very simplistic definitions of human action. The cultural construct of the brain implies a framing of the human as “an individual subject detached from the world it lives in” (Dussauge, “Sex” 446). Here, neuroscience (or biology) doesn’t position itself against the social and the social sciences; it embraces the social and substitutes for humanistic reason. As Dussauge emphasizes: “[N]eurosciences produce neural theories of the social—at the same time disregarding the social, the cultural and critical theories of the same” (“Valuation” 262). Science actively contributes to the material but also ontological definitions of what society is.

If we want to remain potential players in the world we live in, we must continue to prefer “humanistic” forms of explanation (historical, philosophical, sociological, literary, etc.) and the humanities and social sciences’ own protocols to account for the social, cultural, and political realities of our time. This will probably entail developing new ways of describing and defining the world, as Haraway and Braidotti point out. For Haraway, the sciences, and in particular the life sciences, are matters too serious to be left solely to the specialists; by not leaving biology to the biologists one can envisage “a livable biology.” There would be a veritable danger in permitting a sole language to dominate all those possible. We must take hold of the

sciences, work with them, as practices of knowledge, as cultural practices and practical cultures. Yet again, the injunction here is not only of an epistemological or political nature—or merely a theoretical one—but is rendered necessary by our biosocial condition in the technoscientific context.

The fact that human and nonhuman entities are entangled in a “natureculture,” defined by Haraway as our common *topos*, doesn’t mean that we should not find ways to design emancipatory perspectives for the biosocial subjects we have become in that entangled territory.²⁵

In that sense, the epistemic and political territory of the basis of our capacity for individual and collective emancipation still seems, more than ever, to be a territory to be recaptured. The possibility for such sovereignty to prevail and live in the context of a new, open territoriality, where hospitality “at large” is the rule, remains a challenge to this day.

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Notes

- 1 The book that resulted from these meetings is Gardey and Kraus, *Politics of Coalition*.
- 2 It is *infrapolitical* in the sense that it affirms itself as not political but conveys politics. It could be defined, then, as an “infrapolitics” of domination, the opposite of the “‘infrapolitics’ of the subalterns” conceptualized by James C. Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.
- 3 Butler writes: “The dogged effort to ‘denaturalize’ gender in this text [. . .] was done from a desire to live, to make life possible, and to rethink the possible as such” (*Gender* 15).
- 4 Blasphemy as a critique *produced from within* should not be linked to insult, which is meant to harm and hurt. Differences of context and culture are manifest. What *secularizing* means cannot be universalized and detached from contingent forms taken by the relations between religion and politics in the Christian Western world. See Anidjar; or in the Muslim world, Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood xvi. Following Haraway, blasphemy should not be renounced as long as it is *from within* and as long as we remember that “secular critique, if it is to remain critical, must be concerned with the epistemic limits on the knowable imposed by secularism itself” (Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood xvi).
- 5 Written several months before the massive arrival of Syrian and Iraqi refugees at the gates of Europe, these lines have a whole new valence in this context.
- 6 From women in the history of science to feminist science studies, see, for instance, Fox-Keller,

- Reflections*; Harding; Kohlstedt and Longino; and Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action* and *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies*.
- 7 See Findlen; and Harkness.
- 8 We could refer to Biagioli; and Shapin and Schaffer. On the historiographical turn, see Pestre, “Pour une histoire sociale” and *Introduction*, and for a new and broad social and cultural history of science and knowledge since the early modern period, see the three volumes of *Histoire des sciences et des savoirs* edited by Pestre.
- 9 For a critique of *integration* (the word and the practice) in the contemporary French (neo)colonial context, see Guénif-Souilamas, “L’altérité.”
- 10 This discussion is one of the intrafeminist episodes of a larger discussion about what has been called the “linguistic turn.” For more details in the historical field, see Downs. Within the French feminist context, antagonism was also overplayed between “materialist” feminists and their past enemies (the so-called essentialist feminists), who seemed to return to France from the United States wearing new dresses. As Christine Delphy has remarked, “‘French Feminism’ is not feminism in France” (“Invention”). The controversy took place within a broader misunderstanding—or *because* of very well defined theoretical, cultural, and political agendas on both sides. In that sense, transatlantic exchanges didn’t really occur, as academic French elites rejected most of what came (back) “from America.” See Akrich, Chabaud-Rychter, and Gardey; Berger; and Kraus.
- 11 Noiriel is, in fact, the author of the *Le creuset français*, an essential contribution to the analysis of the role played by migrants in the identity of the working class and the definition of the French nation.
- 12 The persistence of this exclusion and this reluctance to accept the theoretical contribution of feminism to history is a mystery in itself. See, for instance, Delacroix; and Riot-Sarcey.
- 13 This question was discussed and replayed during Guénif-Souilamas’s defense of her “habilitation thesis,” reflecting the national, colonial, political, and disciplinary stakes at play and the importance of controlling the disciplinary territory of sociology, as in the previously mentioned case of history.
- 14 My translation of the Larousse French dictionary’s definition of *beur*: “Youth of North African origins born in France of immigrant parents.” About the word and concept, and the assignment and reappropriation of ways of naming oneself and being named, see Guénif-Souilamas, “Beurette.”
- 15 It should be noted here that the models of “assimilation” and “integration” dominating the French debate are also the result of the politics of the European Union; the discourse of each European country has contributed to the formation of a shared doxa.
- 16 See ch. 1, Gardey, *Le linge*.
- 17 This occurred, more particularly, when the Republic finally managed to settle into the Third Republic (1871–1940).
- 18 French women gained the right to vote and be elected on April 21, 1944. The first Assembly elected by actual universal suffrage included 5.6 percent women in October

- 1945 and 6.1 percent in 1997. This disconcerting stability in the nonrepresentation of women led to the movement for parity at the end of the 1990s and to the voting in of constitutional laws requiring equal representation of men and women in electoral mandates. On the origins and the impact of the law, see Achin; Bereni; and Lépinard. On the French Republican paradoxes, see Fraisse; and Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes*.
- 19 As we know, "the Bush administration and Laura Bush used the suffering of women to declare war on Afghanistan" (Mahmood). See also Delphy, "Une guerre?"
- 20 Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers expand on the power (and risk) of what is done "in my name" or "in our name" (as women, feminists, or women of science) and insist on what we should refuse be done "in our name" (25).
- 21 As Sylvia Walby writes, "Gender mainstreaming is an essentially contested concept and practice. It involves the re-invention, restructuring, and re-branding of a key part of feminism in the contemporary era" (321).
- 22 Based on management methods dedicated to the private sector, these types of indicators were first transferred to the public sector (in the 1980s) and then to the universities (in the 1990s). Aggregated data, used in bibliometric contexts, became a management tool of the careers of researchers in the 2000s (Gingras 25). For an exhaustive perspective on the European "research market," see Bruno, "Comment?" and "La recherche."
- 23 On the cultural and linguistic biases in favor of American and English journals and productions in databases such as SCOPUS and ERIH and on the gap between standard bibliometric tools and the diversity of actual French scholarly production in the humanities and social sciences, see Dassa, Kosmopoulos, and Pumain. For commentary on the effectiveness of the international character of a journal such as the *American Review of Sociology* in comparison with *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, see Gingras (77).
- 24 On such feminist explorations on the alternative ways of doing science and society, see Fox-Keller, *A Feeling*; Haraway, *Primate*; and Strum and Fedigan.
- 25 For additional comments on Haraway's ontologies and political propositions for a humanist (and not posthumanist) landscape, see Gardey, "Reading."

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