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Intercultural Dialogues on Gender, Marginality and Higher Education

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Abstract

Many scholars ask today whether there is a need for a common political frontier especially in its insistence on such prerequisites as gender. There is the feeling of political amnesia and individual inability to challenge the pervasive and continuously patriarchal power structures of governments, international corporations, and therefore also educational practices. Education is power, beyond doubt, but what kind of education, whose knowledge and whose interests are being represented, we still need to ask. Gender for that matter is not the only variable affecting educational experiences around the world. Now, that the 'Western' notion of global sisterhood, based on the belief that all women share an experience of oppression, has been abandoned, there is little basis for gender solidarity. In the light of such reflection, we attempt to address the feminist pedagogy of location with respect to the meaning of a 'common ground' in feminist knowledge, and how it affects the educational tactics of self-positioning, the very requirement for autonomous subject. Although volumes have been researched on the topic of gender, the power relations constructing the many categories that intersect with gender continue to trouble feminist inquiry: race, ethnicity, age, physical ability, dialect, citizenship, geographical location, religion, class, sexual preferences... One thing to admit is that no matter how much

inclusiveness is at stake, the list of marginalities remains unexhausted. Judith Butler has referred to this once in terms of “the embarrassing etc. at the end of the list” (1991), and this position is relevant to our intercultural discussion. In this vein, to encompass multiple marginalities is indeed an impossible mission, invariably failing to be complete, but we do not believe to stop at this exhaustion.

One possible point of departure in our reflection on what connects feminist inquiries might be precisely the pejorative meaning of ‘transgression’ that goes to the heart of European history of thought on rationality and logic, operating in terms of binaries in any areas of signification (Braidotti 2002). The idea of trans-, either as a cultural transition, transgression or translation, challenges conservative, conventional and conformist thinking. As such transitions are often rendered temporary and deviant, disclosing culturally vulnerable terrains and therefore targeted by colonial, fascist and nationalist rhetoric. Transgression, in particular, clearly connects with the notion of multiplicity that aims at disrupting the universal, monolithic ways through which educational power structures are maintained, and acknowledges marginality as a necessary rather than inevitable space from which to act. Many of us accept this transgressive figuration of multiplicity as a deconstructive tool of feminist pedagogy, but too often it is also where we ‘choose to stay’, where still too few trans/feminist dialogues take place. What seems indispensable is to re-designate the pejorative character of trans- into an intercultural coalition on different ways of living, different forms of labour, different philosophies and desires. Difference in education must not be merely tolerated, but envisioned as a constant and necessary supply of polarities between which to build ‘common grounds’. These grounds might have no clear centers but they do have, to follow Russo (1991), “shared political commitments”. From these in-between, joint but also transgressive locations marginality can be generated as a site of autonomy and resistance.

Such formulations underlie our understanding of multiple marginalities: ones which exist in the periphery, those with unfixing transformative potential, and those which require culturally shifting and politically multiple interventions of feminist knowledge. It is with this understanding that feminist knowledge can acquire the transformative ‘slash’ (read: become trans/feminist rather than global or local). Today, this knowledge continues to manifest itself through irregular, underpublicized but

significant series of debates, defeats and occasional victories by those who have come to understand the transformative meaning of borders, but is greatly needed in practice so as to connect the disparities in educational experiences all over the globe. This urgency, entering heterogeneous academic disciplines (as well as heterogeneous spaces of culture), manifests itself in the context of past and recent nostalgic returns to local identities across Europe, terrorism, ethnic anxieties, and renewed forms of homophobia. What is thus continuously needed is a greater visibility of transformative rather than deconstructive thought, the knowledge transfer and the knowledge exchange on the subject of multiple marginalities.

One of the most significant effects of such knowledge transfers is our understanding of marginalities: the world-migration from periphery and marginality (i.e. from the postcommunist 'secondary' spaces of Europe or the Third World zones) to the centre of the post-industrial capitalism. This migration has already challenged the claimed cultural homogeneity of many nation-states, their military forces and their political representation, but it yet did not succeed in any tangible transformation. To this effect we believe that a renewed intercultural and trans/feminist dialogue on gender in education is due. Its political effectiveness depends yet very much on certain type of polymorphic unification of its various standpoint positions. The question to start with is whether such dialogue is at all possible. How can the hegemony converse with the marginal, colonized or invisible?

Presently, as we are witnessing the many troublesome inadequacies in global trends of educational reform, a critical application of feminist postcolonial studies become indispensable within a larger political context of globalisation. In critiquing the postcolonial terrain, in particular, it is necessary to address the nostalgic investments in the postcolonial debates that continue as exceedingly theoretical domains contemplating rather than targeting cultural hierarchies of power. While this type of postcolonial thought on cultural difference remains captured within an inaccessible academic sophistication and has little public exposure, the mainstreaming debates on multiculturalism and diversity constantly erupt, further obscuring intra-group differences and intersectional identities. In the political framework of multiculturalism, identity politics that couples women with ethnicity, colour with poverty, or culture with nationalism conceals the multidimensional character of identities, and leads to the

kinds of fundamentalism currently on the rise all over the world.

A possible solution, theoretically recognized by many postcolonial thinkers, draws on conceptualising “differential consciousness” (Sandoval 2000), and formulating “multiply embodied subject positions” (Braidotti 2002). Speaking in theory, this contextual specificity offers a way to negotiate the tensions between fundamentalist positions. In practice, such an understanding continues to disintegrate across various racial, ethnic and national boundaries under the pressures of identity politics and ‘cultural difference’. The focus on cultural difference in particular has more recently been identified as constituting a new form of racism or ethnocentrism organized around an economy of visibility and its emphasis on the visibly racialized body (Gunew 1998). To deconstruct this logic, it is enough to move from the visible to the acoustic: the different types of accents, the ‘Syn/glish’ and the ‘bad English’ spoken by a white non-Anglo-Saxon, especially if coming from the East. Thus a continuous trans/feminist task is to ensure that multicultural and the postcolonial meet amidst the debates on difference and diversity, destabilizing the current domination of either the UK or the US perspectives, as, undoubtedly, more comparative work is well overdue. In the same sense that West is much more than a geographical area, UK often transpires to represent Europe (in English), and so does US to represent the world. Precisely therefore we propose a somewhat provisional, exploratory attempt to foster both an intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue that presents examples from a variety of academic perspectives.

Introduction

This paper situates feminist knowledge in the context of European diversity and migration, more typically from the South and the East, but increasingly also in more variable directions due to the expansion of Western markets and new employment opportunities. While there is much scholarly focus on the many inadequacies in global trends of educational reform, there is little attention paid to the hierarchies across heterogeneity of European ground. Differences, as emerging from such heterogeneity, often display nationalistic undertones which might speak through class, gender, origin or accents. I take the example of Poland as part of the Eastern European ‘compound’ of de-legitimised post/communist area. Over the past decade, numerous academic

publications from the region have developed a tendency to refer to various socio-cultural 'pathologies' of the communist eras. These pathologies derive from discredited totalitarian ideologies and build contemporary diversity of whiteness which in the West acquires specific negative connotations with 'secondary', corrupt and dysfunctional locations.

In critiquing the theoretical (university) terrain, I also address the nostalgic investments in the feminist postcolonial debates that continue contemplating rather than targeting cultural hierarchies of difference. While postcolonial debates on cultural difference remain captured within an inaccessible academic jargon and have little public exposure, the mainstreaming debates on multiculturalism and diversity constantly erupt (Gunew, 1998: 323). The lack of dialogue between theory and practice in the political framework of multiculturalism further obscures the multidimensional character of identities, and leads to the kinds of fundamentalism currently on the rise all over the world. The issue is all the more urgent as differences are expanding along the disappearing borders, currently shaping new categories of people branded as 'others' and forming a "status of disposable bodies" (Braidotti, 2002: 158).

Consider Eastern European identity with its multiplicity of identifications: European 'centrality,' Western South, Balkan and most significantly the East, precariously embracing 'free market economy' and the various phantasms of consumerism. It is interesting to notice how scholars from the region will inadvertently refer to their Central rather than Eastern European locations, as if naming could erase historical stigmas. Interestingly, naming helps but mainly to cover the wounds of invisibility, and make the 'natural' forgetting into another cultural commodity. Moreover, while the Western investments in developing economies expand towards the East, the post/communist locations are emerging as new cartographies of neo-liberal power. These emerging markets, not yet commensurable with capitalist thinking, have a task of building up to the "Western standards", but possibly by remaining politically peripheral. The citizenship boundaries, constructed for example by EU, work thereby as political filters holding the 'proper bodies' (those with valid EU passports) and expelling 'improper' towards continuous expansion towards East.

Following Bryan Turner, in the case in European languages, there is no linguistic possibility for the love of foreigners. As it seems, no social role would allow to

posit a stranger (*xenos*) as an object of genuine friendship (Turner, 2006: 608). “We might conclude therefore that xenophobia is the normal state of affairs in the relationship between the social groups” (Turner, 2006: 608). Given the crisis of white homogeneity and the increase of xenophobia, Eastern European background is not necessarily a category on its own, but it stands for the particularity of geographies that remain inferior to the Western canon, in particular if perceived from within the space of privilege. The past and recent ‘invasions’ of unemployed Poles to the UK for example clearly attests to a particular construction of ‘Eastern background’ which decomposes the monolithic construct of Eurocentric whiteness, gesturing towards the more provisional spaces of the privileged colour. This comes not only surprisingly to some anti-racist scholars, but is also obliging to include whiteness, with its entire propensity towards grey and shabby, on the scheme of skin ‘colours’ (Roma, Jews, Belo-Russian, Kosova, Tartars...). It compels us to extend the perception of colour from the different shades of blackness towards the less visible, but acoustically sound (Gunew, 1998: 326) through certain kinds of accents, ‘unpronounceable’ last names, and repressed ethnic communities (which accents often represent). The task is to recognize that ‘racialization’ of non-citizens or immigrants have more to do with their accents and passports than with their actual skin colour. Lalani’s work on race in the UK context (2006) confirms the significance of the accent, whereby the Canadian, Australian or US accents, although not ‘quite proper’ variations of English, are conventionally accepted as ‘proper’ whereas Kenyan or Albanian accent is not. In general, accents ‘in English’ from traditionally Western locations with history of geopolitical domination, such as Germany or France, are symbols of cultural and intellectual authority. These variations are valued and even celebrated. Paradoxically then, African immigrants in the UK might experience discrimination in the job market as a consequence of their African accents rather than racial appearance (Lalani, 2006: 384), although certainly nothing excludes the latter. On the scale of these acoustic hierarchies, Eastern European accent contributes to its own invisibly coloured particularity, manifesting the ‘background’ as an acute type of incompatibility with the hegemony of whiteness.

Some other hierarchies of difference derive from the encounters between East European immigrant scholars and North American policy requirements that often

dismiss European diversity due to equity politics that attempts to promote minorities based on racial marks of colour, rather than on origin, status or citizenship. It would seem that, if we want to find a way out of such biologising practice, the fissures, folds and shades within whiteness require more precise cultural translation of the differences in process. What I mean by 'translation' is a form of exercise that brings in subjectivity into the social relations and into mythology that preserve the metaphor of whiteness against the odds of its own displacement. Such exercise of translation draws our attention to what gets lost if the national shades of 'whiteness' remain invisible, and what is preserved as ethnicity, or the spectacular, performative sites of tradition, and what constitutes cultural/collective difference as a political agency of representation.

Finally, my call for practice cannot ignore the history of feminist pedagogy which has been developing along the issue of intercultural encounters. My intervention comes therefore from within a critique of what constitutes 'Europeanness' and of contemporary feminist contentions. Although these two epistemologically different phenomena would seem to require different approaches, I establish my standpoint both in relation to the Western hegemony and as a critique of 'transfeminist' subject. I argue against separating questions of origin, ethnicity, or color and their particular relationship with the postcolonial subject from contemporary feminist anxieties as well as national or racial interests by which over-simplified conceptions of cultural difference are sustained. The underlying premise is to address the feminist pedagogy of location with respect to the meaning of a 'common ground' in feminist knowledge, and how it affects the educational tactics of self-positioning, the very requirement for autonomous subject.

In addressing the unresolved relationship between feminism and race, one has to address the continuous academic climate of dichotomy of colour, the context through which issues of colour are being fixed and reproduced as a binary designation. One has to address the scholarly tensions between multiculturalism that recently acquired numerous disciplinary accents and 'postcolonial melancholia' (Gilroy 2006), both caught in mutual manipulations. The continuous reproduction of culture of whiteness against the culture of difference makes it increasingly difficult for a feminist scholar (and I think especially one that works across boundaries and borders) to embrace a kind of identity politics that currently takes place at numerous North American universities. I refer to the politics often resulting in having students leaving their

classrooms bewildered and dichotomized, inherently divided: one has been victimized, paralysed in her inability to act, the other is the oppressor that has to carry all the responsibility and guilt, unable to talk to her 'coloured' colleague otherwise but through the prism of that guilt. On the top, the advice goes, *don't take it personal, it's theory* - but everything personal is in the end compellingly political. Increasingly, to follow Gunew, the dichotomies of difference have congealed into imprisoning essentialisms (such as that of nationality or skin colour) which obscure rather than illuminate intra-group differences (Gunew, 1998: 326). As a result of such dichotomizing standards, it has become a routine to ignore students commenting that, in the women studies' courses, they have been taught that feminism is fraudulent, split, divided. So what's the point of speaking about solidarity across the various borders? Such contentious conclusions have been widely projected during the last few years as Islamophobia and 'war on terror' have increasingly shaped public debate. White scholars are not supposed to teach 'race' while scholars of color are often branded as anti-multiculturalists, whereby multiculturalism suggests a conception of mosaic diversity in which difference is symmetrical or at least similarly configured. This particular tendency to mark scholars along with their 'colour' is telling us volumes about the current workings of multiculturalism. However, I believe that at the very ethical bottom of every border (if we believe that there is such bottom) lies the notion of a dialogue, and through this, a new understanding of thinking about race.

As I argue, transformative knowledge starts with intercultural dialogues. To put it very clear, every dialogue is an encounter and every encounter is a form of transformation. Dialogues enable knowledge exchange and are particularly needed in the context of the post-communist East where new complexities of difference are on the rise. One of the most significant effects of such knowledge transfers is our understanding of marginalities: the world-migration from periphery and marginality, i.e. from the 'secondary' spaces of Europe (or the Third World zones, which are further complicated by racial inequalities), to the centre of the post-industrial capitalism. This migration has already challenged the claimed cultural homogeneity of many nation-states, their military forces and their political representation, but it yet did not succeed in any tangible transformation. Instead, neo-liberal thinking and capital investments expand towards so far underprivileged regions. To this effect, a renewed intercultural

and trans/feminist dialogue on education is due, and this task, to a large extent, lies in the hands of academic practice. Its political effectiveness depends yet very much on certain type of polymorphic unification of various standpoint positions. I'm not sure whether this way of thinking is cause for optimism, or simply a way of thinking together despite conflicts and difference.

The question to start with is whether such dialogue is at all possible. How can the hegemony converse with the marginal, colonized or mispronounced? A good example of such 'mispronounced' topography is an old but popular joke reassuring a Pole that 'his/her English is *polish(ed)* enough', and speaks to certain hierarchies within the structure of sameness. It also interferes with the monolithic structure of Europeanness that obliterates specific historical configurations of diversity. A key difficulty with respect to such 'interference', and, in due course, with respect to 'transformation' of the social, rests in the formulation of a structure that is same but remains 'undecidable'. The encounters between 'sameness' and the 'undecidable' are often acoustic, followed by rituals of apologetic superficialities '*Is this how you pronounce your name? I am I sure didn't say it right.*'

Another question in this scheme of thought refers to the political meanings of culture. National 'culture', one of the privileged names of tradition and conservative action, operates on a clearly problematic premise that 'culture' represents and unifies the 'nation', that there is something monolithic and universal about national culture and normative sameness which need to be adopted and implemented by all. To be part of culture means therefore to know the boundaries of culture, whereby language appears as a prison/home of the body that has learned the culture without accent (a body has become linguistically invisible). By the same token, partial, or incomplete assimilation reappears as a site of conflict. To return to the historical production of undesirables such as Eastern European passport and accent, but then of course Balkan, or so-called Southern East, it is not surprisingly uncommon that passports and accents similarly affect on the willingness and reception of one particular 'white' by another. What follows is the internalized inferiority within the category of privilege, disqualification which takes place without much notice, and therefore without recognizing that the prize is paid in exchange for safety. Precisely because white is 'still white', just as body is encoded and fixed with particular values, it manifests hegemony

despite the differences in process. English might serve here as an example: the language currently colonizing every aspect of Eastern economy and culture (the kind of substitute colonizer, a token of globalization) that is taken with relief ('we have McDonalds in town'), and even welcomed. English, the most comprehensible metaphor of the West, serves as a way of return to the place of fantasized origin, the hegemony that might recognize its step-children after all. It is by looking at these mimetic gestures that origin and identity become less obvious, indeed far from representing fixed and irrevocable points of historical reference. In the process of large-scale demographic shifts, as borders become more porous within the European Union, national identities and cultural memory are already in translation, transforming subjectivities of both immigrants and hosts under the umbrella of democracy. Without much notice then, Polish identifications with the West, and in particular with its neo-liberal wrapping of goods, is making friends with another type of colonization (economic, cultural and linguistic at once), whereby it is not only the 'eloquence' or 'elegant formulation' of difference that is lost in translation. Bad English, the Eastern European 'Syn/glish' is always about bad particularity.

The Polish map of memory points to yet another less acknowledged crack in hegemony. The memory rehearsed and confirmed continues in the works of such filmmakers and writers as Mickiewicz, Reymont, Sienkiewicz, Gombrowicz, Wajda or Kieslowski – the list is much longer and remains as such fundamentally masculine, rendering women silent substratum (Irigaray 1975) of this social suborder; failing to show the complexity of the nation that through pain and desire homogenizes individuals. This includes Michael J. Mikos's forthcoming anthology (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) on 'Polish literature from 1945 to 2000', which almost exclusively refers to male authors under the alarming assumption that no significant literary contributions were made by women writersⁱ. If Western (white) feminism has overcome the problems of anthologies that discounted women writers, Polish literature is certainly not part of the picture. How these differences are negotiated involves work on multiplicity that is difficult to categorize into homogeneous sets. What such work on multiplicity auspiciously reveals is that not all the 'white' locations are equally privileged, equally feminist or equally geo-politically significant. The relation between the illusionary hegemonic Western identity and the 'substandard' Eastern European

identity is somewhat mirrored in the ‘invisibility’ of feminist theory coming from the East, or even resistance to Western feminism perceived as a stereotypical monolithic anti-male stance. Feminist writings of contemporary East (the post-communist East as well as profoundly patriarchal European South) have thus worked on developing their own ‘autography’, in which ‘I’ and ‘we’ are the most important words in the continuously transformed and re-enacted identifications. In many of these locations, the allegedly global sisterhood that has otherwise been challenged to give up their theorizing monopoly of power, has been hardly ever influential. To illustrate this, Eastern European antipathy to feminism is often attributed to previous experiences with socialist slogans of gender equality and the association of public spaces with manipulations of power. Indeed, the few politically ‘active’ women wore the stigma of being elected on the basis of quotas and the majority of the population viewed them as tokens in the politics. A tradition of refusal as part of the Eastern European psyche, “refusal of propaganda, ideology, political messianism, big liberatory ideas” (Busheikin, 1997: 14), is certainly felt in Eastern/Central European feminist context. In this vein, trans/European discussions often become frustrated by the theoretical imperialism of Anglo-Saxon discourse, and the exclusion of untranslated opinions and voices. The problem of elucidating ‘different’ gender and race sensitivity (or consciousness) is itself problematic, because it is measured in relation to the ‘same’, more established or familiar scenarios.ⁱⁱ Precisely because Polish/ Eastern Europeans are white, they are buried under the homogeneity of the familiar, but without equally participating in the privilege. I am tempted to quote a Canadian teenager welcoming back a friend who spent his holidays in Poland: *How does it feel to return to civilization?* The answer itself is interesting as it wavers between my friend’s confusion and the sort of awe at how one *can be so stupid*.

Moving Borders, Things and Sounds

One possible point of departure in my reflection on what connects feminist inquiries is the pejorative meaning of ‘transgression’ that goes to the heart of European philosophy, rationality and logic, operating in terms of binaries in any areas of

signification (Braidotti, 2002: 41). The idea of trans-, either as a cultural transition, transgression or translation, challenges conservative, conventional and conformist thinking. As such transitions are often rendered temporary and deviant, disclosing culturally vulnerable terrains and therefore targeted by colonial, fascist and nationalist rhetoric. Transgression clearly connects with the notion of multiplicity and disrupts the universal, monolithic ways through which educational structures work. In this sense, Transformative thinking is transgressive thinking that acknowledges marginality as a necessary rather than inevitable space from which to act. Many academics have accepted this transgressive figuration as a deconstructive tool of feminist pedagogy, but too often it is also where we 'choose to stay', where still too few trans/feminist dialogues take place. What seems indispensable is to re-designate the pejorative character of trans- into an intercultural coalition on different ways of living, different forms of labour, different philosophies and desires. Difference in education must not be merely tolerated, but envisioned as a constant and necessary supply of polarities between which to build 'common grounds'. These grounds might have no clear centers but they do have, to follow Russo, "shared political commitments" (1991: 302). From these in-between, joint but also transgressive locations marginality can be generated as a site of autonomy and resistance. It is with this understanding that feminist knowledge can acquire the transformative 'slash' (read: become trans/feminist rather than global or local).

In the early 1980s, when second-wave feminist theorists began to publish, still having one foot in the activist milieu associated with the new social movements, the relation between theory and practice seemed relatively fluid. "It felt natural to address problems that emerged out of political practice and to trust that one's reflections would filter back down to the grassroots, if not directly, then through various intermediaries." (Nash and Bell, 2007: 74). It seemed possible to equally engage the fellow academics and the social movements on the outside of academia. "What united these enterprises", to follow Fraser, "was an overarching ethos in which theoretical clarity and political confidence seemed to go hand in hand. There was an unspoken but vividly felt sense that the political objectives were clear and that the road to achieving them was open" (Nash and Bell, 2007: 74). Today, however, the situation is different, largely because the overall political landscape is much more ambiguous. Transformative

thinking continues to manifest itself through irregular, underpublicized but significant series of debates, defeats and occasional victories by those who have come to understand the shifting meaning of borders, but such thinking is greatly needed in practice so as to connect the disparities in educational experience. This urgency, entering heterogeneous academic disciplines (as well as heterogeneous spaces of culture), manifests itself in scholarly suspicion whether there is a need for a common political frontier especially in its insistence on such prerequisites as gender or race. There is the feeling of political amnesia and individual inability to challenge the sometimes pervasive and sometimes hidden patriarchal and homophobic structures of education. Emancipatory movements still exist, “but the earlier sense of clarity has given way to a ‘new obscurity’ (to use Habermas’s phrase), in which progressive currents lack both a coherent vision of an alternative to the present order and also a plausible scenario as to how such a vision could conceivably be realized” (Nash and Bell, 2007: 75). In this light, both feminist and postcolonial theorizing are failing the multicultural projects once carried outside the protective matrix of the university.

Certainly, there are many reasons for this failure. First is the philosopher’s inability to move things toward practice. Second, solidarity among academics is dissolving, and North American feminism can serve here as an example. Now, that the ‘Western’ notion of global sisterhood, based on the belief that women share an experience of gender oppression, has been clearly abandoned (Russo, 1991: 301), there is just as little basis for solidarity among women as there is commonality among scholars that fall into the category of European ‘whiteness’. What troubles feminist inquiry are the power relations constructing and informing the many categories that intersect with racial difference: location, ethnicity, accent, dialect, citizenship, religion, class, sexual preferences... To encompass the situated morphology of a subject (gendered in as much as political or social) is an impossible or never-ending act of justice. Judith Butler has referred to this phenomenon in terms of “the embarrassing etc. at the end of the list” (1990: 143), and I believe this embarrassment is relevant to educational practice. Simply continuing adding issues to the list of human rights might actually lead to guilt and condescension, as well as to a partial and limiting politics of inclusion. This tendency is of course instructive, and we might conclude with Butler,

that the political impetus to be derived from the 'etc' "is a sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself" (1990: 143).

A good example, theoretically recognized by many postcolonial thinkers, draws on conceptualising "differential consciousness" (Sandoval, 2000: 47), and "embodied subject positions" (Braidotti, 2002: 40). Speaking in theory, this contextual specificity offers a way to negotiate the tensions between fundamentalist positions. In practice, such an understanding continues to disintegrate across various racial, ethnic and national boundaries under the pressures of identity politics and 'cultural difference'. The focus on cultural difference in particular has more recently been identified as constituting a new form of racism or ethnocentrism organized around an economy of visibility and its emphasis on the visibly racialized body (Gunew, 1998: 330). To deconstruct this logic, it is enough to move from the visible to the acoustic: the different types of accents, the 'Syn/glish' and the 'bad English' spoken by a white non-Anglo-Saxon, especially if coming from the East. Thus a continuous trans/feminist task is to ensure that multicultural and the postcolonial meet amidst the debates on difference and diversity, destabilizing the current domination of either the UK or the US perspectives, as, undoubtedly, more comparative work is well overdue. In the same sense that West is much more than a geographical area, UK often transpires to represent Europe (in English), and so does US to represent the world.

In many ways, Butler's 'illimitable et cetera' parallels Braidotti's proposal of the 'embodied becoming' understood as spontaneous and *immediate* desire to escape the limits of identity, a desire generated as those limits are experienced and practiced in their narrowness, even their absurdity. Both Butler and Braidotti offer a critique of the fixed category that persistently displaces its own diversification. The past and more recent nostalgic returns to regional European identities and the cultural production of national sameness that supports various evocative reassertions of 'origin' calls for such work against categories: work that would enable an intercultural dialogue and allow appreciation of national, cultural and ethnic/racial encounters. Schools are most vulnerable terrains where dangers of identity referencing are plenty, and 'Europeaness' continues to be deployed as the defining 'human' condition ('whiteness' as a permanent reference to supremacy or beauty, coupled with other fixities, such as heterosexuality or upper middle class status). Such homogenizing fantasy of

‘Europeanness’ remains at odds with the very structure of its subjectivity, a phenomenon often referred to as ‘intersectionality’.

Still, these academic proposals have remained largely theoretical and therefore less helpful for conceiving questions of justice. Nancy Fraser offers an interesting intervention in this debate. In her life project on the economic and cultural dimensions of justice she insisted, for a long time, on the sufficiency of these two dimensions which by necessity would include the political. In the late 1990s, however, along the intensification of the neoliberal thinking and globalisation, Fraser began to rethink her original theory and included a ‘representational’ dimension which derives neither from economy nor culture directly. What leads Fraser to incorporate ‘representation’ as a political dimension of justice is not “the first-order political injustices, which arise *within* the established frame of a bounded polity. Her concern “is with meta-level political injustices, which arise as a result of the division of political space *into* bounded polities.” An example is the way in which public educational systems of (supposedly) sovereign states appropriate political space at the expense of the poor. Fraser refers in this respect to the concept of ‘misframing’, which is also central to present-day struggles over globalisation. She writes, “when political space is unjustly framed, the result is the denial of political voice to those who are cast outside the universe of those who ‘count’. Thus, representation concerns the intersection of symbolic framing and democratic voice” (Nash and Bell, 2007: 77). What remains to say is that both the political dimension of justice and the question of framing must move beyond theoretical dispute. What is needed is a greater visibility of transformative rather than deconstructive thought able to unfix its culturally shifting and politically multiple potential.

Conclusion

Historically, education has constituted and represented power. We seem to believe, in a post-Foucauldian sense, that knowledge coupled with power continues as a ruling monopoly, yet specific inquires into what kind of education and whose knowledge are conveyed remain indispensable. What is also needed is a renewed link between theoretical dialogues and actual political encounters within the spaces of higher education. In an attempt to reframe this necessity, I propose to look at ethnicity and

nation in their intersections as ‘minority’, and not necessarily as sites of incompatibility, but by the very reality of intersections, as sites of delineated limits to order: as ‘representable difference’ and subjectivity.ⁱⁱⁱ If ‘difference’ is to be freed from its negative epistemology, it needs to be freed from its entrapment in the illusion of equality. By this I mean the kind of strategy that always assumed inferiority of one party against the other and therefore calls for justice in terms of ‘mainstreaming’^{iv} the inferior, rescuing it from the uncivilized and the unpronounceable, without validating or welcoming its philosophy as such.

In contextualizing the social, there is no going back to the old equality/difference debate in the sense of an exclusive focus on any single axis of difference. The shifts from ‘difference’ to ‘differences within culture’ and towards ‘multiple intersecting differences’ have already begun, although it does not necessarily imply that we should forget the old debate. Rather what seems to be at stake today is the need for connections between the problems of cultural difference with those of social equality (Fraser, 1997: 186). Nothing precludes that subjects are both culturally constructed and capable of distance from its own ‘constructedness’ (1997: 187). Although the subject is the product of prior signifying processes, it is capable of ‘resignification’ (Butler, 1995: 248) and of ‘critique’ (Fraser, 1997: 187). In this sense, only permeable boundaries are healthy, allowing for some type of relaxation, as well as for new accounts of fantasy opening ways out of the limiting significations. The critical promise of such fantasy “is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called fantasy”, as fantasy “is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise” (Butler, 2004: 29). The lines drawn by fantasy, as every fantasy has a concrete outline and limits to itself, are best understood as invitations to cross over and that crossing over towards multi-layered theoretical position constitutes what otherwise disintegrates and divides: a fragile but politically constructive space of un/belonging. Although trans-, inter- and cross-identifications put subjects politically at risk, they simultaneously allow for re-zoning tabooed territories and stigmatized borders. It is in this interplay of border positions that the resistance, mimesis and parody take place. In theory thus, we might refer to a contextual negotiation of tensions between various standpoint positions. In practice, this negotiation is more vulnerable than ever, and under old and new pressures of ‘cultural difference’, it continues to split across various racial, ethnic and national

boundaries. A continuous intellectual task is to ensure that multicultural and the postcolonial meet amidst the debates on difference and diversity, destabilizing the current lapsing into unproductive guilt, as more comparative intersectional work is emerging.

ⁱ I refer to Michael J. Mikos's conference paper, "From a Canon to an Anthology: Polish Literature from 1945 to 2000," and his participation in the panel, "Issues in Translation," presented at the international conference "In Search of (Creative) Diversity" at the University of Toronto (Canada) Feb. 1-5, 2006.

ⁱⁱ In the Introduction to *Thinking Differently* (2003), Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti presented readers with a task: *Think about feminist theory: how many feminist thinkers from Europe, and in particular from the South and the East, can you instantly name?*

ⁱⁱⁱ Both Etienne Balibar's and Rosi Braidotti's work on identity delineates the Western inscription of transgression as heresy, monstrosity, and deviance that serve as 'representable difference' of any constructed subjectivity that continues to be inscribed with the negative signification.

^{iv} I refer to the policy adopted by the European Union (EU) 'to promote equality between men and women in all activities and policies at all levels' (COM (96) 67 final). This has led to new legislation in member states on equal pay, equal treatment, parental leave and maternity rights, sexual harassment at work and protection of part-time and fixed-term and contracted work. However, as numerous feminists have recently observed the EU mainstreaming strategy "has been selective in its use of feminist theory" and "focused on organization structure (including language) as a major barrier to change people's attitudes and behaviour. While it recognizes the concept of gendered processes on structural, interpersonal and symbolic levels, it does not locate these in an analysis of patriarchy". The latter can, among others, "appear to be a diluted version of positive action strategies and may appear irrelevant to women's lives. Consequently, feminist scholars and practitioners have been critical of a mainstreaming strategy and have been slow to make a contribution to the policy debate" (Booth and Bennett, 2002).

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