



**UBA Sociales**  
FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES

**CÁTEDRA SALCEEK**  
**INGLÉS GLOBAL**  
**MODELOS DE EXAMEN**

**EXAMEN DE INGLÉS GLOBAL**

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**Social Media and the Post-Truth World Order.****The Global Dynamics of Disinformation**

Gabriele Cosentino

**1.3 Forms and Functions of Post-truth**

Harsin (2018) identifies three main forms of deceptive communication—rumor bombs, fake news and lies—as examples of the current post-truth phenomenon. He compares rumor bombs to “statements whose veracity is unknown or unprovable, and to communication bombs as longtime forms of information warfare migrating from military to politics” (2018, 8). Rumor bombs can be elaborate, contradictory and contain ambiguous claims, so that they generate confusion and disagreement among public opinion. Rumor bombs can break into the news-cycle after emerging from the subcultural fringes of the Internet or they can be spread by professionalized disinformation campaigns in the context of political campaigns or military conflicts.

An example of a rumor bomb that worked as a preamble to the current post-truth era—and perhaps not incidentally jumpstarted the political career of Donald Trump—is the 2011 ‘birther’ conspiracy theory against Obama, based on the rumor that he was not born in the United States and thus didn’t meet the requirement to be president. While in the 2008 election cycle the rumor remained confined to the periphery of the political conversation, after 2011 the birthers campaign started to be amplified by prominent bloggers and social media, which elevated its visibility, until it was brought into the mainstream by Donald Trump. As is often the case in post-truth politics, the debunking of the rumor didn’t completely displace it from public conversation. Another example or a rumor bomb is the Pizzagate conspiracy theory targeting Hillary Clinton in the period

before the 2016 election. Unlike fake news, which is entirely false, rumors can turn out to be true or contain a modicum of truth. The Pizzagate conspiracy theory, based on rumors alleging that Hillary Clinton was part of a pedophiles' ring active in Washington DC, contained references to the case of convicted pedophile and sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, who had had established relations with Bill Clinton.

Fake news is the most popular sub-category of the broader post-truth phenomenon. Unlike rumor bombs, fake news is patently false or fabricated statements. The term became popular between 2015 and 2016, during the Brexit campaign and the 2016 US elections, as a catch-all category identifying various forms of disinformation and misinformation. The term later lost part of its original meaning as various politicians, including Trump, started to use it to dismiss unfavorable coverage and criticism by the media or political opponents. Some academics have cautioned against using the term in relation to post-truth because it frames the problem as isolated incidents of falsehood (Bennett and Livingston 2018), while others have criticized its opaqueness and the political connotations that it has acquired (Benkler et al. 2018). Fake news has also been used to identify producers of false information whose only intention is to leverage on the social media economy of attention simply in order to generate profit. Such type of fake or junk news, despite their lack of political intentions, can nonetheless engender political effects, by entering amplification channels of politically motivated actors.

It is worth pointing out that the term fake news was originally associated with satire news programs blending information and entertainment such as *The Daily Show* with John Stewart and *The Colbert Report* (Baym and Jones 2012). John Stewart famously attacked CNN in 2004, blaming legacy media for their failure to perform a necessary watchdog function on the US government decisions in a sensitive moment such as the post- 9/11 period. The critique of mainstream news brought forth by satire news shows can thus be seen as a precursor of the current trust crisis of journalism and of the traditional media outlets. For two decades, satire news programs have revealed the shortcomings and the codependency of traditional media vis-à-vis the political establishment, instilling in people's minds the suspicion that news was packaged as products to be sold, and that journalistic objectivity was a fabricated myth.

The 'postmodern' and skeptical spectator of satire news shows is thus aware, at times cynically, that mediated reality is a construct. An important aspect of the postmodern

sensibility lies in its fascination with the process of representation, which is often exposed and deconstructed to reveal the 'behind the scene,' the marks of authorship and the blurring of the border between stage and backstage. The audience becomes knowledgeable and skeptical of televisual representations, suspicious even, and thus transfers trust onto new and alternative means of mediation and information that acknowledge this postmodern sensibility. Legacy news media is thus challenged by satire news programs or by on-line independent news outlets, while the political outsider is preferred to the professional politician. Populist leader and former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi—himself a television tycoon, thus well versed in the logic of spectacle and entertainment— was one of the first to intercept this cultural disposition and tap on it to build a new brand of postmodern politics (Cosentino and Doyle 2010). In a similar vein, Trump, a former reality TV host and a savvy user of the media, has titillated popular discontent posing as a political outsider claiming to take on the corruption and inefficiencies of the political establishment.

As for the third sub-category, lying, Harsin sees it as inherently associated with the post-truth condition, whose most visible feature is the noticeable increase of deceptive communications and of discourses around lies and deception, as well as of the instruments and services like fact checking or rumor-debunking websites, which are part of the new economy of 'truth-markets' (Harsin 2018). Lies and deceptions can also be seen as structurally inherent to contemporary political communication and journalistic practices, as the logic of entertainment has influenced politics and journalism to the point that tactics of performance, seduction and visibility are emphasized and cultivated to the detriment of truthfulness and honesty.

Hate speech, nationalistic tropes, nativist and racist slurs, uttered either in jest—for the lulz—or to provoke intentionally, spread from the fringes of the Internet to occupy the center of public conversations. Trolling as a new genre of political speech, promoted by the virality and popularity incentives of social media, is becoming a salient trait of the new mediated public discourse. From a fringe political practice to now a mainstream form of political spectacle, trolling has become a staple of the political discussions enabled by social media (Marwick and Lewis 2017; Hannan 2018). The alt-right online communities and their media ecosystem, based on a plurality of platforms such as Breitbart News, Infowars, 4chan and Reddit, have received significant academic and media attention (Benkler et al. 2018; Marwick and Lewis 2017; Nagle 2017). In

particular, the subcultural symbols, codes and jargons emerging out of online forums such as 4chan and Reddit seem to have had a profound impact in shaping the alt-right political sensibilities. Benkler et al. call the meme wars or ‘memetic warfare’ of the alt-right as a new type of ‘core political speech’ (2018, 12).

The alt-right community and its media have played a significant role in the advent of the post-truth condition. As pointed out by Bennett and Livingston, the term alt-right has expanded “to encompass a broader range of interconnected radical right causes and conspiracy theories promoted through information sites that often mimic journalism in order to distribute strategic disinformation” (Bennett and Livingston 2018, 125). Such alternative communication spaces often circulate political narratives advocating for ‘stronger authority, nationalism and anti-immigration’ policies, which often engender the ‘disinformation–amplification–reverberation’ cycle that allows them to enter the mainstream media and public discourse. While the focus of Bennet and Livingston is on the American political context, many other nations are currently suffering a similar problem. In their argument, the trust crisis in democratic institutions is linked to the hollowing out of mass parties and declining electoral representation. Such breakdown of essential processes of political representation and engagement makes “national information systems vulnerable to strategic disinformation campaigns by a plurality of actors” (Bennett and Livingston 2018, 127), both domestic and foreign.

A further dimension of post-truth is indeed the influence operations carried out by State actors based on disinformation and media manipulation aimed at destabilizing elections and governments, or to influence the course of armed conflicts (Woolley and Howard 2018). Such strategic forms of computational propaganda are aimed at inserting false and polarizing information and narratives into the political conversations of other nations. Covert influence tactics operate by leveraging the technological features and affordances of social media, by taking advantage of the difficulty that lawmakers have in regulating and policing such platforms, as well as by tapping on popular sentiments of discontent and frustration to further exacerbate the political crisis of rival countries.

Responda las siguientes consignas **utilizando únicamente la información suministrada en el texto:**

- 1) Caracterice en palabras propias:
  - a) el concepto de *fake news* y los dos momentos en la evolución de su sentido y connotaciones;
  - b) las posturas de la comunidad académica con respecto al uso del término;
  - c) la subcategoría derivada del fenómeno *fake news*.
- 2) ¿Cuál es el antecedente directo del fenómeno *fake news*? Explique el proceso en palabras propias referenciando
  - a) sus características;
  - b) sus efectos sobre la opinión pública;
  - c) sus efectos sobre el proceso de representación;
  - d) sus efectos sobre la escena política, incluyendo los ejemplos ilustrativos consignados por el autor.
- 3) Desarrolle en palabras propias los fundamentos por los cuales Harsin incluye a la mentira dentro de la condición de la post verdad.
- 4) Caracterice en palabras propias:
  - a) el termino *alt- right*;
  - b) sus espacios alternativos de comunicación;
  - c) su incidencia en los medios hegemónicos y el discurso público;
  - d) el discurso resultante y sus ciclos de difusión.
- 5) Sintetice la última dimensión de la post verdad que desarrolla el autor.

Cátedra Salceek

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### Defining Masculinity

Raewyn Connell

Chapter 1 traced the main currents of twentieth-century research and showed that they had failed to produce a coherent science of masculinity. This does not reveal the failure of the scientists so much as the impossibility of the task. 'Masculinity' is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced. Yet we can have coherent knowledge about the issues raised in these attempts. If we broaden the angle of vision, we can see masculinity, not as an isolated object, but as an aspect of a larger structure. This demands an account of the larger structure and how masculinities are located in it. The task of this chapter is to set out a framework based on contemporary analyses of gender relations. This framework will provide a way of distinguishing types of masculinity, and of understanding the dynamics of change. First, however, there is some ground to clear. The definition of the basic term in the discussion has never been wonderfully clear.

All societies have cultural accounts of gender, but not all have the concept 'masculinity'. In its modern usage the term assumes that one's behaviour results from the type of person one is. That is to say, an unmasculine person would behave differently: being peaceable rather than violent, conciliatory rather than dominating, hardly able to kick a football, uninterested in sexual conquest, and so forth. This conception presupposes a belief in individual difference and personal agency. In that sense it is built on the conception of individuality that developed in early-modern Europe with the growth of colonial empires and capitalist economic relations (an issue I will explore further in Chapter 8).

But the concept is also inherently relational. 'Masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity'. A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture. Historical research suggests that this was true of European culture itself before the eighteenth century. Women were certainly regarded as different from men, but different in the sense of being incomplete or inferior examples of the same character (for instance, having less of the faculty of reason). Women and men were not seen as bearers of qualitatively different characters; this conception accompanied the bourgeois ideology of 'separate spheres' in the nineteenth century.

In both respects our concept of masculinity seems to be a fairly recent historical product, a few hundred years old at most. In speaking of masculinity at all, then, we are 'doing gender' in a culturally specific way. This should be borne in mind with any claim to have discovered transhistorical truths about manhood and the masculine. Definitions of masculinity have mostly taken our cultural standpoint for granted, but have followed different strategies to characterize the type of person who is masculine. Four main strategies have been followed; they are easily distinguished in terms of their logic, though often combined in practice.

*Essentialist* definitions usually pick a feature that defines the core of the masculine, and hang an account of men's lives on that. Freud flirted with an essentialist definition when he equated masculinity with activity in contrast to feminine passivity - though he came to see that equation as oversimplified. Later authors' attempts to capture an essence of masculinity have been colourfully varied: risk-taking, responsibility, irresponsibility, aggression, Zeus energy... Perhaps the finest is the sociobiologist Lionel Tiger's idea that true maleness, underlying male bonding and war, is elicited by 'hard and heavy phenomena'. Many heavy-metal rock fans would agree. The weakness in the essentialist approach is obvious: the choice of the essence is quite arbitrary. Nothing obliges different essentialists to agree, and in fact they often do not. Claims about a universal basis of masculinity tell us more about the ethos of the claimant than about anything else.

*Positivist* social science, whose ethos emphasizes finding the facts, yields a simple definition of masculinity: what men actually are. This definition is the logical basis of



masculinity/femininity (M/F) scales in psychology, whose items are validated by showing that they discriminate statistically between groups of men and women. It is also the basis of those ethnographic discussions of masculinity which describe the pattern of men's lives in a given culture and, whatever it is, call the pattern masculinity.

There are three difficulties here. First, as modern epistemology recognizes, there is no description without a standpoint. The apparently neutral descriptions on which these definitions rest are themselves underpinned by assumptions about gender. Obviously enough, to start compiling an M/F scale one must have some idea of what to count or list when making up the items.

Second, to list what men and women do requires that people be already sorted into the categories 'men' and 'women'. This, as Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna showed in their classic ethnomethodological study of gender research, is unavoidably a process of social attribution using common-sense typologies of gender. Positivist procedure thus rests on the very typifications that are supposedly under investigation in gender research.

Third, to define masculinity as what-men-empirically-are is to rule out the usage in which we call some women 'masculine' and some men 'feminine', or some actions or attitudes 'masculine' or 'feminine' regardless of who displays them. This is not a trivial use of the terms. It is crucial, for instance, to psychoanalytic thinking about contradictions within personality. Indeed, this usage is fundamental to gender analysis. If we spoke only of differences between men as a bloc and women as a bloc, we would not need the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' at all. We could just speak of 'men's' and 'women's', or 'male' and 'female'. The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' point beyond categorical sex difference to the ways men differ among themselves, and women differ among themselves, in matters of gender.

*Normative* definitions recognize these differences and offer a standard: masculinity is what men ought to be. This definition is often found in media studies, in discussions of exemplars such as John Wayne or of genres such as the thriller. Strict sex role theory treats masculinity precisely as a social norm for the behaviour of men. In practice, male sex role texts often blend normative with essentialist definitions. Normative definitions allow that different men approach the standards to different degrees. But this soon

produces paradoxes, some of which were recognized in the early Men's Liberation writings. Few men actually match the 'blueprint' or display the toughness and independence acted by Wayne, Bogart or Eastwood. (This point is picked up by film itself, in spoofs such as *Blazing Saddles* and *Play it Again, Sam.*) What is 'normative' about a norm hardly anyone meets? Are we to say the majority of men are unmasculine? How do we assay the toughness needed to resist the norm of toughness, or the heroism needed to come out as gay? A more subtle difficulty is that a purely normative definition gives no grip on masculinity at the level of personality. Joseph Pleck correctly identified the unwarranted assumption that role and identity correspond. This assumption is, I think, why sex role theorists often drift towards essentialism.

*Semiotic* approaches abandon the level of personality and define masculinity through a system of symbolic difference in which masculine and feminine places are contrasted. Masculinity is, in effect, defined as not-femininity. This follows the formulae of structural linguistics, where elements of speech are defined by their differences from each other. The approach has been widely used in feminist and poststructuralist cultural analyses of gender and in Lacanian psychoanalysis and studies of symbolism. It yields more than an abstract contrast of masculinity and femininity, of the kind found in M/F scales. In the semiotic opposition of masculinity and femininity, masculinity is the unmarked term, the place of symbolic authority. The phallus is master-signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack.

This definition of masculinity has been very effective in cultural analysis. It escapes the arbitrariness of essentialism and the paradoxes of positivist and normative definitions. It is, however, limited in its scope - unless one assumes, as some postmodern theorists do, that discourse is all we can talk about in social analysis. To grapple with the full range of issues about masculinity we need ways of talking about relationships of other kinds too: about gendered places in production and consumption, places in institutions and in natural environments, places in social and military struggles.

What can be generalized is the principle of connection. The idea that one symbol can only be understood within a connected system of symbols applies equally well in other spheres. No masculinity arises except in a system of gender relations. Rather than attempting to define masculinity as an object (a natural character type, a behavioural

average, a norm), we need to focus on the processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. 'Masculinity', to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.

Responda las siguientes consignas **utilizando únicamente la información suministrada en el texto**:

- 1) Especifique los dos presupuestos históricos/ ideológicos que dan sustento al uso moderno del término *masculinidad*.
- 2) En palabras propias, sintetice
  - a) las cuatro estrategias de caracterización de la masculinidad;
  - b) las críticas formuladas por la autora a cada una de ellas.
- 3) En palabras propias, explique
  - a) en qué consiste el *principio de conexión*;
  - b) de qué manera contribuye a pensar las definiciones de masculinidad.
- 4) Redacte una breve fundamentación de las siguientes afirmaciones **sobre la base de lo trabajado en el texto**:
  - a) 'Masculinity' is not a coherent object about which a generalizing science can be produced.
  - b) In speaking of masculinity at all, then, we are 'doing gender' in a culturally specific way.

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**Gender as a Structure of SocialPractice**

Raewyn Connell

In this section I will set out, as briefly as possible, the analysis of gender that underpins the argument of the book.

Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction. This arena includes sexual arousal and intercourse, childbirth and infant care, bodily sex difference and similarity. I call this a 'reproductive arena' not a 'biological base' to emphasize the point that we are talking about a historical process involving the body, not a fixed set of biological determinants. Gender is social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body. Indeed reductionism presents the exact reverse of the real situation. Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does not determine the social. It marks one of those points of transition where historical process supersedes biological evolution as the form of change. Gender is a scandal, an outrage, from the point of view of essentialism. Sociobiologists are constantly trying to abolish it, by proving that human social arrangements are a reflex of evolutionary imperatives.

Social practice is creative and inventive, but not inchoate. It responds to particular situations and is generated within definite structures of social relations. Gender relations, the relations among people and groups organized through the reproductive arena, form one of the major structures of all documented societies. Practice that relates to this structure, generated as people and groups grapple with their historical situations, does not consist of isolated acts. Actions are configured in larger units, and when we speak of masculinity and femininity we are naming configurations of gender practice. Taking a dynamic view of the organization of practice, we arrive at an understanding of

masculinity and femininity as gender projects. These are processes of configuring practice through time, which transform their starting-points in gender structures.

We find the gender configuring of practice however we slice the social world, whatever unit of analysis we choose. The most familiar is the individual life course, the basis of the commonsense notions of masculinity and femininity. The configuration of practice here is what psychologists have traditionally called 'personality' or 'character'. Such a focus is liable to exaggerate the coherence of practice that can be achieved at any one site. It is thus not surprising that psychoanalysis, originally stressing contradiction, drifted towards the concept of 'identity'.

Post-structuralist critics of psychology such as Wendy Hollway have emphasized that gender identities are fractured and shifting, because multiple discourses intersect in any individual life. This argument highlights another site, that of discourse, ideology or culture. Here gender is organized in symbolic practices that may continue much longer than the individual life (for instance: the construction of heroic masculinities in epics; the construction of 'gender dysphorias' or 'perversions' in medical theory).

Chapter 1 noted how social science had come to recognize a third site of gender configuration, institutions such as the state, the workplace and the school. Many find it difficult to accept that institutions are substantively, not just metaphorically, gendered. This is, nevertheless, a key point. The state, for instance, is a masculine institution. To say this is not to imply that the personalities of top male office-holders somehow seep through and stain the institution. It is to say something much stronger: that state organizational practices are structured in relation to the reproductive arena. The overwhelming majority of top office-holders are men because there is a gender configuring of recruitment and promotion, a gender configuring of the internal division of labour and systems of control, a gender configuring of policymaking, practical routines, and ways of mobilizing pleasure and consent.

The gender structuring of practice need have nothing biologically to do with reproduction. The link with the reproductive arena is social. This becomes clear when it is challenged. An example is the recent struggle within the state over 'gays in the military', i.e., the rules excluding soldiers and sailors because of the gender of their sexual object-choice. In the United States, where this struggle was most severe, critics

made the case for change in terms of civil liberties and military efficiency, arguing in effect that object-choice has little to do with the capacity to kill. The admirals and generals defended the status quo on a variety of spurious grounds. The unadmitted reason was the cultural importance of a particular definition of masculinity in maintaining the fragile cohesion of modern armed forces.

It has been clear since the work of Juliet Mitchell and Gayle Rubin in the 1970s that gender is an internally complex structure, where a number of different logics are superimposed. This is a fact of great importance for the analysis of masculinities. Any one masculinity, as a configuration of practice, is simultaneously positioned in a number of structures of relationship, which may be following different historical trajectories. Accordingly masculinity, like femininity, is always liable to internal contradiction and historical disruption.

We need at least a three-fold model of the structure of gender, distinguishing relations of (a) power, (b) production and (c) cathexis (emotional attachment). This is a provisional model, but it gives some purchase on issues about masculinity.

a) *Power relations*: The main axis of power in the contemporary European/American gender order is the overall subordination of women and dominance of men - the structure Women's Liberation named 'patriarchy'. This general structure exists despite many local reversals (e.g., woman-headed households, female teachers with male students). It persists despite resistance of many kinds, now articulated in feminism. These reversals and resistances mean continuing difficulties for patriarchal power. They define a problem of legitimacy which has great importance for the politics of masculinity.

b) *Production relations*: Gender divisions of labour are familiar in the form of the allocation of tasks, sometimes reaching extraordinarily fine detail. (In the English village studied by the sociologist Pauline Hunt, for instance, it was customary for women to wash the inside of windows, men to wash the outside.) Equal attention should be paid to the economic consequences of gender divisions of labour, the dividend accruing to men from unequal shares of the products of social labour. This is most often discussed in terms of unequal wage rates, but the gendered character of capital should also be noted. A capitalist economy working through a gender division of labour is, necessarily, a gendered accumulation process. So it is not a statistical accident, but a part of the social

construction of masculinity, that men and not women control the major corporations and the great private fortunes. Implausible as it sounds, the accumulation of wealth has become firmly linked to the reproductive arena, through the social relations of gender.

c) *Cathexis*: As I noted in Chapter 2, sexual desire is so often seen as natural that it is commonly excluded from social theory. Yet when we consider desire in Freudian terms, as emotional energy being attached to an object, its gendered character is clear. This is true both for heterosexual and homosexual desire. (It is striking that in our culture the non-gendered object choice, 'bisexual' desire, is ill-defined and unstable.) The practices that shape and realize desire are thus an aspect of the gender order. Accordingly we can ask political questions about the relationships involved: whether they are consensual or coercive, whether pleasure is equally given and received. In feminist analyses of sexuality these have become sharp questions about the connection of heterosexuality with men's position of social dominance.

Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender 'intersects' - better, interacts - with race and class. We might add that it constantly interacts with nationality or position in the world order.

This fact also has strong implications for the analysis of masculinity. White men's masculinities, for instance, are constructed not only in relation to white women but also in relation to black men. White fears of black men's violence have a long history in colonial and post-colonial situations. Black fears of white men's terrorism, founded in the history of colonialism, have a continuing basis in white men's control of police, courts and prisons in metropolitan countries. African-American men are massively over-represented in American prisons, as Aboriginal men are in Australian prisons.

Similarly, it is impossible to understand the shaping of working class masculinities without giving full weight to their class as well as their gender politics. An ideal of working-class manliness and self-respect was constructed in response to class deprivation and paternalist strategies of management, at the same time and through the same gestures as it was defined against working-class women. The strategy of the 'family wage', which long depressed women's wages in twentieth-century economies, grew out of this interplay.

To understand gender, then, we must constantly go beyond gender. The same applies in reverse. We cannot understand class, race or global inequality without constantly moving towards gender. Gender relations are a major component of social structure as a whole, and gender politics are among the main determinants of our collective fate.

Responda las siguientes consignas **utilizando únicamente la información suministrada en el texto:**

- 1) Fundamente en palabras propias la afirmación “Gender is a scandal, an outrage, from the point of view of essentialism. Sociobiologists are constantly trying to abolish it, by proving that human social arrangements are a reflex of evolutionary imperatives.”
- 2) Sintetice los argumentos expuestos por la autora para postular los procesos de género como «arena reproductiva» y enumere las distintas maneras en las que el Estado se organiza en función de esta arena reproductiva.
- 3) Sintetice en palabras propias los tres sitios de configuración de género desarrollados por la autora.
- 4) ¿Qué ejemplo proporciona la autora para ilustrar el vínculo social entre la estructuración de género y la arena reproductiva?
- 5) Caracterice en palabras propias el modelo tridimensional de estructura de género que propone la autora.
- 6) Desarrolle en palabras propias las variables de interseccionalidad del género en tanto estructurante de la práctica social y su gravitación en el análisis de las masculinidades.



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**Gender Trouble. Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions**

Judith Butler

Categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics. These constructs of identity serve as the points of epistemic departure from which theory emerges and politics itself is shaped. In the case of feminism, politics is ostensibly shaped to express the interests, the perspectives, of “women.” But is there a political shape to “women,” as it were, that precedes and prefigures the political elaboration of their interests and epistemic point of view? How is that identity shaped, and is it a political shaping that takes the very morphology and boundary of the sexed body as the ground, surface, or site of cultural inscription? What circumscribes that site as “the female body”? Is “the body” or “the sexed body” the firm foundation on which gender and systems of compulsory sexuality operate? Or is “the body” itself shaped by political forces with strategic interests in keeping that body bounded and constituted by the markers of sex?

The sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of “the body” that preexists the acquisition of its sexed significance. This “body” often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as “external” to that body. Any theory of the culturally constructed body, however, ought to question “the body” as a construct of suspect generality when it is figured as passive and prior to discourse. There are Christian and Cartesian precedents to such views which, prior to the emergence of vitalistic biologies in the nineteenth century, understand “the body” as so much inert matter, signifying nothing or, more specifically, signifying a profane void, the fallen state: deception, sin, the premonitional metaphors of hell and the eternal feminine. There are many occasions in both Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s work where “the body” is figured as a mute facticity, anticipating some meaning that can

be attributed only by a transcendent consciousness, understood in Cartesian terms as radically immaterial. But what establishes this dualism for us? What separates off “the body” as indifferent to signification, and signification itself as the act of a radically disembodied consciousness or, rather, the act that radically disembodies that consciousness? To what extent is that Cartesian dualism presupposed in phenomenology adapted to the structuralist frame in which mind/body is redescribed as culture/nature? With respect to gender discourse, to what extent do these problematic dualisms still operate within the very descriptions that are supposed to lead us out of that binarism and its implicit hierarchy? How are the contours of the body clearly marked as the taken-for-granted ground or surface upon which gender significations are inscribed, a mere facticity devoid of value, prior to significance?

Wittig suggests that a culturally specific epistemic *a priori* establishes the naturalness of “sex.” But by what enigmatic means has “the body” been accepted as a *prima facie* given that it admits of no genealogy? Even within Foucault’s essay on the very theme of genealogy, the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription: “the body is the inscribed surface of events.” The task of genealogy, he claims, is “to expose a body totally imprinted by history.” His sentence continues, however, by referring to the goal of “history”—here clearly understood on the model of Freud’s “civilization”—as the “destruction of the body”. Forces and impulses with multiple directionalities are precisely that which history both destroys and preserves through the *Entstehung* (historical event) of inscription. As “a volume in perpetual disintegration”, the body is always under siege, suffering destruction by the very terms of history. And history is the creation of values and meanings by a signifying practice that requires the subjection of the body. This corporeal destruction is necessary to produce the speaking subject and its significations. This is a body, described through the language of surface and force, weakened through a “single drama” of domination, inscription, and creation. This is not the *modus vivendi* of one kind of history rather than another, but is, for Foucault, “history” in its essential and repressive gesture.

Although Foucault writes, “Nothing in man [*sic*]—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men [*sic*]”, he nevertheless points to the constancy of cultural inscription as a “single drama” that acts on the body. If the creation of values, that historical mode of signification, requires the destruction of the body, much as the instrument of torture in Kafka’s “In the Penal

Colony” destroys the body on which it writes, then there must be a body prior to that inscription, stable and self- identical, subject to that sacrificial destruction. In a sense, for Foucault, as for Nietzsche, cultural values emerge as the result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed—that is, fully transvaluated into a sublimated domain of values. Within the metaphors of this notion of cultural values is the figure of history as a relentless writing instrument, and the body as the medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for “culture” to emerge.

Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* suggests that the very contours of “the body” are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence. Any discourse that establishes the boundaries of the body serves the purpose of instating and naturalizing certain taboos regarding the appropriate limits, postures, and modes of exchange that define what it is that constitutes bodies:

ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.

Although Douglas clearly subscribes to a structuralist distinction between an inherently unruly nature and an order imposed by cultural means, the “untidiness” to which she refers can be redescribed as a region of cultural unruliness and disorder. Assuming the inevitably binary structure of the nature/culture distinction, Douglas cannot point toward an alternative configuration of culture in which such distinctions become malleable or proliferate beyond the binary frame. Her analysis, however, provides a possible point of departure for understanding the relationship by which social taboos institute and maintain the boundaries of the body as such. Her analysis suggests that what constitutes the limit of the body is never merely material, but that the surface, the skin, is systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions; indeed, the boundaries of the body become, within her analysis, the limits of the social *per se*. A poststructuralist appropriation of her view might well understand the boundaries of the body as the limits of the socially hegemonic. In a variety of cultures, she maintains, there are

pollution powers which inhere in the structure of ideas itself and which punish a symbolic breaking of that which should be joined or joining of that which should be separate. It

follows from this that pollution is a type of danger which is not likely to occur except where the lines of structure, cosmic or social, are clearly defined.

A polluting person is always in the wrong. He [sic] has developed some wrong condition or simply crossed over some line which should not have been crossed and this displacement unleashes danger for someone.

In a sense, Simon Watney has identified the contemporary construction of “the polluting person” as the person with AIDS in his *Policing Desire: AIDS, Pornography, and the Media*. Not only is the illness figured as the “gay disease,” but throughout the media’s hysterical and homophobic response to the illness there is a tactical construction of a continuity between the polluted status of the homosexual by virtue of the boundary-trespass that is homosexuality and the disease as a specific modality of homosexual pollution. That the disease is transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids suggests within the sensationalist graphics of homophobic signifying systems the dangers that permeable bodily boundaries present to the social order as such. Douglas remarks that “the body is a model that can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.” And she asks a question which one might have expected to read in Foucault: “Why should bodily margins be thought to be specifically invested with power and danger?”

Douglas suggests that all social systems are vulnerable at their margins, and that all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. Since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS. Similarly, the “polluted” status of lesbians, regardless of their low-risk status with respect to AIDS, brings into relief the dangers of their bodily exchanges. Significantly, being “outside” the hegemonic order does not signify being “in” a state of filthy and untidy nature. Paradoxically, homosexuality is almost always conceived within the homophobic signifying economy as *both* uncivilized and unnatural.

Responda las siguientes consignas **utilizando únicamente la información suministrada en el texto:**

- 1) ¿Cuáles son los interrogantes que plantea la autora con respecto a la construcción identitaria del feminismo?
- 2) Desarrolle en palabras propias las críticas de la autora a las representaciones del cuerpo en las categorizaciones teóricas.
- 3) Contextualice y explique la siguiente afirmación: *“This is not the modus vivendi of one kind of history rather than another, but is, for Foucault, “history” in its essential and repressive gesture.”*
- 4) Desarrolle en palabras propias el concepto de *“history as a relentless writing instrument”*.
- 5) ¿En qué consiste el concepto de *“cultural unruliness and disorder”* propuesto por Mary Douglas? ¿Cuáles son sus limitaciones y su valor epistemológico según la autora?
- 6) Explique en palabras propias la relación entre enfermedad , márgenes corporales y contaminación en el contexto de los sistemas de significación de la homofobia.

Cátedra Salceek

## EXAMEN DE INGLÉS GLOBAL

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### The Society of Positivity

Byung- Chul Han

No buzzword dominates contemporary public discourse so much as “transparency.” Above all, it is emphatically invoked in connection with freedom of information. The omnipresent demand for transparency, which has reached the point of fetishism and totalization, goes back to a paradigm shift that cannot be restricted to the realm of politics and economics. Today the society of negativity is yielding to a society that progressively dismantles negativity in favor of positivity. Accordingly, the society of transparency manifests itself first and foremost as a *society of positivity*.

Matters prove transparent when they shed all negativity, when they are smoothed out and leveled, when they do not resist being integrated into smooth streams of capital, communication, and information. Actions prove transparent when they are made operational—subordinate to a calculable, steerable, and controllable process. Time becomes transparent when it glides into a sequence of readily available present moments. This is also how the future undergoes positivization, yielding an optimal presence. Transparent time knows neither fate nor event. Images are transparent when—freed from all dramaturgy, choreography, and scenography, from any hermeneutic depth, and indeed from any meaning at all—they become pornographic. Pornography is unmediated contact between the image and the eye. Things prove transparent when they abandon their singularity and find expression through their price alone. Money, which makes it possible to equate anything with anything else, abolishes all incommensurability, any and all singularity. The society of transparency is an *inferno of the same*.

Whoever connects transparency only with corruption and the freedom of information has failed to recognize its scope. Transparency is a *systemic* compulsion gripping all social processes and subjecting them to a deep-reaching change. Today's social system submits all its processes to the demand for transparency in order to *operationalize* and *accelerate* them. Pressure for acceleration represents the corollary of dismantling negativity. Communication reaches its maximum velocity where like responds to like, when a chain reaction of likeness occurs. The negativity of alterity and foreignness—in other words, the resistance of the Other—disturbs and delays the smooth communication of the Same. Transparency stabilizes and speeds the system by eliminating the Other and the Alien. This systemic compulsion makes the society of transparency a calibrated society. Herein lies its totalitarian trait.

Transparent language is a formal, indeed, a purely machinic, operational language that harbors no ambivalence. A world consisting only of information, where communication meant circulation without interference, would amount to a machine. The society of positivity is dominated by the transparency and obscenity of information in a universe emptied of event. Compulsion for transparency flattens out the human being itself, making it a functional element within a system. therein lies the violence of transparency.

Clearly the human soul requires realms where it can be at home without the gaze of the Other. It claims a certain impermeability. Total illumination would scorch it and cause a particular kind of *spiritual burnout*. Only machines are transparent. Eventfulness and freedom, which constitute life fundamentally, do not admit transparency. The ideology of “postprivacy” proves equally naïve. In the name of transparency, it demands completely surrendering the private sphere, which is supposed to lead to see-through communication. The view rests on several errors. For one, human existence is *not transparent, even to itself*. According to Freud, the ego denies precisely what the unconscious affirms and desires without reserve. The id remains largely hidden to the ego. Therefore, a rift runs through the human psyche and prevents the ego from agreeing even with itself. This fundamental rift renders self-transparency impossible. A rift also gapes between people. For this reason, interpersonal transparency proves impossible to achieve. It is also not worth trying to do so. The other's very lack of transparency is what keeps the relationship alive.

Compulsive transparency lacks this same “sensitivity”—which simply means respect for



Otherness that can never be completely eliminated. Given the pathos for transparency that has laid hold of contemporary society, it seems necessary to gain practical familiarity with the pathos of distance. Distance and shame refuse to be integrated into the accelerated circulation of capital, information, and communication. In this way, all confidential spaces for withdrawing are removed in the name of transparency. Light floods them, and they are then depleted. It only makes the world more shameless and more naked.

Nor does the society of positivity tolerate negative feelings. Consequently, one loses the ability to handle suffering and pain, to give them form. For Nietzsche, the human soul owes its depth, grandeur, and strength precisely to the time it spends with the negative. Human spirit is born from pain, too. The society of positivity is now in the process of organizing the human psyche in an entirely new way. In the course of positivization, even love flattens out into an arrangement of pleasant feelings and states of arousal without complexity or consequence. Alain Badiou's *In Praise of Love* quotes the slogans of the dating service Meetic: "Be in love without falling in love!" Or, "You don't have to suffer to be in love!" Love undergoes domestication and is positivized as a formula for consumption and comfort. Even the slightest injury must be avoided. Suffering and passion are figures of negativity. On the one hand, they are giving way to enjoyment without negativity. On the other, their place has been taken by psychic disturbances such as exhaustion, fatigue, and depression—all of which are to be traced back to the excess of positivity.

Theory in the strong sense of the word is a phenomenon of negativity, too. It makes a decision determining what belongs and what does not. As a mode of highly selective narration, it draws a line of distinction. On the basis of such negativity, theory is violent. Without the negativity of distinction, matters proliferate and grow promiscuously. In this respect, theory borders on the ceremonial, which separates the initiated and the uninitiated. It is mistaken to assume that the mass of positive data and information—which is assuming untold dimensions today— has made theory superfluous, that is, that comparing data can replace the use of models. Theory, as negativity, occupies a position anterior to positive data and information. Data-based positive science does not represent the cause so much as the effect of the imminent end of theory, properly speaking. It is not possible to replace theory with positive science. The latter lacks the negativity of decision, which determines what *is*, or what *must be*, in the first place. Theory as negativity makes reality itself appear ever and radically different; it presents reality in another light.



Politics is strategic action. For this reason alone, it inhabits a realm of secrecy. Total transparency cripples it. Only politics amounting to *theatocracy* can do without secrets. In such a case, however, political action gives way to mere staging. It follows that the end of secrecy would be the end of politics. As the party of transparency, the Pirate Party<sup>1</sup> is continuing the move toward the postpolitical; this amounts to depoliticization. It is an antiparty, a party without color. Transparency is colorless. Convictions do not gain entry as ideologies, but only as ideology-free opinions. Opinions are matters of no consequence; they are neither as comprehensive nor as penetrating as ideologies. They lack cogent negativity. Therefore, today's *society of opinion* leaves what already exists untouched. "Liquid democracy" displays flexibility by changing colors according to circumstance. The Pirate Party represents a colorless party of opinion. Here politics yields to administering social needs while leaving the framework of socio-economic relations unchanged and clinging to them. As an antiparty, the Pirate Party proves unable to articulate political will or to produce new social coordinates.

Compulsive transparency stabilizes the existing system most effectively. Transparency is inherently positive. It does not harbor negativity that might radically question the political-economic system as it stands. It is blind to what lies outside the system. It confirms and optimizes only what already exists. For this reason, the society of positivity goes hand-in-hand with the postpolitical. Only depoliticized space proves wholly transparent. Without *reference*, politics deteriorates into a matter of *referendum*.

The general consensus of the society of positivity is "Like." It is telling that Facebook has consistently refused to introduce a "Dislike" button. The society of positivity avoids negativity in all forms because negativity makes communication stall. The value of communication is measured solely in terms of the quantity of information and the speed of exchange. The mass of communication also augments its economic value. Negative judgments impair communication. Further communication occurs more quickly following "Like" than "Dislike." Most importantly, the negativity that rejection entails cannot be exploited economically.

Transparency and truth are not identical. Truth is a negative force insofar as it presents

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<sup>1</sup> Pirate Party is a label adopted by political parties in different countries. Pirate parties support civil rights, direct democracy (including e-democracy) or alternative participation in government, reform of copyright and patent law, free sharing of knowledge (open content), information privacy, transparency, freedom of information, free speech, anti-corruption and net neutrality.

and asserts *itself* by declaring *all else* false. Further information—or simply an accumulation of information— produces no truth. It lacks direction, that is, sense. Precisely because of the lacking negativity of what holds true, positivity proliferates and propagates. Hyperinformation and hypercommunication attest to lack of truth—indeed, to lack of being. More information, or more communication, does not eliminate the fundamental absence of clarity of the whole. If anything, it heightens it.

Responda las siguientes consignas **utilizando únicamente la información suministrada en el texto**:

- 1) ¿Qué características tiene el proceso dentro del cual se enmarca la transparencia?
- 2) Fundamente en palabras propias la aseveración: «The society of transparency is an *inferno of the same*».
- 3) Explique en palabras propias las formas en que la aceleración incide sobre la transparencia y su relación con el totalitarismo.
- 4) ¿Qué relación se plantea entre lenguaje y violencia?
- 5) ¿Qué críticas formula el autor a la ideología de la posprivacidad?
- 6) ¿A qué se refiere el autor con el concepto de «pathos of distance» y cuál es su importancia?
- 7) Explique en palabras propias la relación que traza el autor entre la positividad, el agotamiento y la depresión.
- 8) Desarrolle los fundamentos expuestos por el autor para postular el fin inminente de la teoría.
- 9) ¿Qué caracterizaciones formula el autor en su definición de la democracia líquida?
- 10) ¿Cómo vincula el autor la transparencia con la pospolítica?
- 11) ¿De qué manera incide la positividad en la comunicación?
- 12) ¿Qué espacio ocupa la verdad en la configuración presentada por el autor en este fragmento?

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**An Agonistic Model**

Chantal Mouffe

It is in the context of the ever-present possibility of antagonism that I have elaborated what I call an ‘agonistic’ model of democracy. My original intention was to provide a ‘metaphoric redescription’ of liberal democratic institutions– a redescription that could grasp what was at stake in pluralist democratic politics. I have argued that in order to understand the nature of democratic politics and the challenge that it faces, we needed an alternative to the two main approaches in democratic political theory.

One of those approaches, the aggregative model, sees political actors as being moved by the pursuit of their interests. The other model, the deliberative one, stresses the role of reason and moral considerations. What both of these models leave aside is the centrality of collective identities and the crucial role played by affects in their constitution.

My claim is that it is impossible to understand democratic politics without acknowledging ‘passions’ as the driving force in the political field. The agonistic model of democracy aims to tackle all the issues that cannot be properly addressed by the other two models because of their rationalist, individualistic frameworks.

Let me briefly recall the argument I elaborated in *The Democratic Paradox*. I asserted that when we acknowledge the dimension of ‘the political’, we begin to realize that one of the main challenges for pluralist liberal democratic politics consists in trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations. In my view, the fundamental question is not how to arrive at a consensus reached without exclusion, because this would require the construction of an ‘us’ that would not have a corresponding ‘them’. This is impossible because, as I have just noted, the very condition for the constitution of an ‘us’ is the demarcation of a ‘them’.

The crucial issue then is how to establish this us/them distinction, which is constitutive of politics, in a way that is compatible with the recognition of pluralism. Conflict in liberal democratic societies cannot and should not be eradicated, since the specificity of pluralist democracy is precisely the recognition and the legitimation of conflict. What liberal democratic politics requires is that the others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed, but as adversaries whose ideas might be fought, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas is not to be questioned. To put it in another way, what is important is that conflict does not take the form of an 'antagonism' (struggle between enemies) but the form of an 'agonism' (struggle between adversaries).

For the agonistic perspective, the central category of democratic politics is the category of the 'adversary', the opponent with whom one shares a common allegiance to the democratic principles of 'liberty and equality for all', while disagreeing about their interpretation. Adversaries fight against each other because they want their interpretation of the principles to become hegemonic, but they do not put into question the legitimacy of their opponent's right to fight for the victory of their position. This confrontation between adversaries is what constitutes the 'agonistic struggle' that is the very condition of a vibrant democracy.

A well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation of democratic political positions. If this is missing, there is always the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identifications. Too much emphasis on consensus, together with aversion towards confrontations, leads to apathy and to a disaffection with political participation. This is why a liberal democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives. It must provide political forms of identification around clearly differentiated democratic positions.

While consensus is no doubt necessary, it must be accompanied by dissent. Consensus is needed on the institutions that are constitutive of liberal democracy and on the ethico-political values that should inform political association. But there will always be disagreement concerning the meaning of those values and the way they should be implemented. This consensus will therefore always be a 'conflictual consensus'.

In a pluralist democracy, disagreements about how to interpret the shared ethico-political

principles are not only legitimate but also necessary. They allow for different forms of citizenship identification and are the stuff of democratic politics. When the agonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered because of a lack of democratic forms of identifications, then passions cannot be given a democratic outlet. The ground is therefore laid for various forms of politics articulated around essentialist identities of a nationalist, religious or ethnic type, and for the multiplication of confrontations over non-negotiable moral values, with all the manifestations of violence that such confrontations entail.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding, let me stress once again that this notion of 'the adversary' needs to be distinguished sharply from the understanding of that term found in liberal discourse. According to the understanding of 'adversary' proposed here, and contrary to the liberal view, the presence of antagonism is not eliminated, but 'sublimated'. In fact, what liberals call an 'adversary' is merely a 'competitor'. Liberal theorists envisage the field of politics as a neutral terrain in which different groups compete to occupy the positions of power, their objective being to dislodge others in order to occupy their place, without putting into question the dominant hegemony and profoundly transforming the relations of power. It is simply a competition among elites.

In an agonistic politics, however, the antagonistic dimension is always present, since what is at stake is the struggle between opposing hegemonic projects which can never be reconciled rationally, one of them needing to be defeated. It is a real confrontation, but one that is played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries.

I contend that it is only when we acknowledge 'the political' in its antagonistic dimension that we can pose the central question for democratic politics. This question, *pace* liberal theorists, is not how to negotiate a compromise among competing interests, nor is it how to reach a 'rational', i.e. fully inclusive, consensus without any exclusion. Despite what many liberals want to believe, the specificity of democratic politics is not the overcoming of the we/they opposition, but the different way in which it is established. The prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions or to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere. Rather, it is to 'sublimate' those passions by mobilizing them towards democratic designs, by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives.

I am aware that the current zeitgeist is not favourable to such an understanding of 'the political', as the tendency to envisage this domain in ethical terms is much more popular. Several authors coming from different theoretical horizons could provide examples of this 'ethical turn', but I have chosen to say a few words about Alain Badiou. Badiou distinguishes between the political and politics, but his distinction differs from my own. He uses the term 'le politique' (the political) to refer to traditional political philosophy, and the term 'la politique' (politics) to designate his own position. In his view, a political philosophy which advocates the plurality of opinions and excludes the notion of truth is bound to end up promoting the politics of parliamentarism. Against the characterization of the political as a plurality of opinions, Badiou asserts the singularity of politics produced by subjects who are defined by their singular relation to a truth event and not by their mutual exchange of opinions.

Politics, he claims, is the order of truth and the event, and he is adamant that, to allow for the event to occur, it is necessary to leave aside all the facts and to be faithful to something which is not a given act of reality. Indeed, an event is an evanescent interruption of the real. The decision of a subject to remain faithful to an event is what produces a truth. This is how he puts it: 'I shall call "truth" (a truth) the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation.'

According to the approach that I am advocating, the domain of politics is not and cannot be the domain of the unconditional because it requires making decisions in an undecidable terrain. This is why the type of order which is established through a given hegemonic configuration of power is always a political, contestable one; it should never be justified as dictated by a higher order and presented as the only legitimate one.

As I argued earlier, to institute an order, frontiers need to be drawn and the moment of closure must be faced. But this frontier is the result of a political decision; it is constituted on the basis of a particular we/they, and for that very reason it should be recognized as something contingent and open to contestation. What characterizes democratic politics is the confrontation between conflicting hegemonic projects, a confrontation with no possibility of final reconciliation. To conceive such a confrontation in political, not ethical, terms requires asking a series of strategic questions about the type of 'we' that a given politics aims at creating and the chain of equivalences that is called for.

This cannot take place without defining an adversary, a 'they' that will serve as a 'constitutive outside' for the 'we'. This is what can be called the 'moment of the political', the recognition of the constitutive character of social division and the ineradicability of antagonism. This is why theorists who are unable or unwilling to acknowledge this dimension cannot provide an effective guide for envisaging the nature of radical politics.

Responda las siguientes consignas **utilizando únicamente la información suministrada en el texto:**

- 1) Explique la visión de la autora sobre el rol del conflicto y su relación con el consenso en una democracia plural.
- 2) Caracterice la categoría que la autora propone como condición principal de la democracia.
- 3) ¿Cómo funciona el consenso conflictual y por qué la autora lo considera necesario para una democracia plural?
- 4) Desarrolle las dos conceptualizaciones contrapuestas de «adversario» y explique la importancia de esta categoría para el modelo postulado en este fragmento.
- 5) Fundamente la siguiente afirmación: «According to the approach that I am advocating, the domain of politics is not and cannot be the domain of the unconditional because it requires making decisions in an undecidable terrain.»

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### **The Democratic Paradox**

Chantal Mouffe

Albeit in different ways, all the essays collected in this volume deal with what I call 'the paradox' of modern democracy and they try to examine its diverse political and theoretical implications. My reflection begins with an enquiry into the nature of modern democracy, which I think is far from having been properly elucidated. The novelty of modern democracy, what makes it properly 'modern', is that, with the advent of the 'democratic revolution', the old democratic principle that 'power should be exercised by the people' emerges again, but this time within a symbolic framework informed by the liberal discourse, with its strong emphasis on the value of individual liberty and on human rights. Those values are central to the liberal tradition and they are constitutive of the modern view of the world. Nevertheless, one should not make them part and parcel of the democratic tradition whose core values, equality and popular sovereignty, are different. Indeed, the separation between church and state, between the realm of the public and that of the private, as well as the very idea of the *Rechtsstaat*, which are central to the politics of liberalism, do not have their origin in the democratic discourse but come from elsewhere.

It is therefore crucial to realize that, with modern democracy, we are dealing with a new political form of society whose specificity comes from the articulation between two different traditions. On one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; on the other the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed, and popular sovereignty. There is no necessary relation between those two distinct traditions but only a contingent historical articulation. Through such an



articulation, as C. B. MacPherson was keen to emphasize, liberalism was democratized and democracy liberalized. Let's not forget that, while we tend today to take the link between liberalism and democracy for granted, their union, far from being a smooth process, was the result of bitter struggles. The dominant tendency today consists in envisaging democracy in such a way that it is almost exclusively identified with the *Rechtsstaat* and the defence of human rights, leaving aside the element of popular sovereignty, which is deemed to be obsolete. This has created a 'democratic deficit' which, given the central role played by the idea of popular sovereignty in the democratic imaginary, can have very dangerous effects on the allegiance to democratic institutions. The very legitimacy of liberal democracy is based on the idea of popular sovereignty and, as the mobilization of such an idea by right-wing populist politicians indicates, it would be a serious mistake to believe that the time has come to relinquish it. Liberal-democratic institutions should not be taken for granted: it is always necessary to fortify and defend them. This requires grasping their specific dynamics and acknowledging the tension deriving from the workings of their different logics. Only by coming to terms with the democratic paradox can one envisage how to deal with it.

As my discussion of Carl Schmitt's theses in Chapter 2 makes clear, democratic logics always entail drawing a frontier between 'us' and 'them', those who belong to the 'demos' and those who are outside it. This is the condition for the very exercise of democratic rights. It necessarily creates a tension with the liberal emphasis on the respect of 'human rights', since there is no guarantee that a decision made through democratic procedures will not jeopardize some existing rights. In a liberal democracy limits are always put on the exercise of the sovereignty of the people. Those limits are usually presented as providing the very framework for the respect of human rights and as being non-negotiable. In fact, since they depend on the way 'human rights' are defined and interpreted at a given moment, they are the expression of the prevailing hegemony and thereby contestable. What cannot be contestable in a liberal democracy is the idea that it is legitimate to establish limits to popular sovereignty in the name of liberty. Hence its paradoxical nature.

A central argument in this book is that it is vital for democratic politics to understand that liberal democracy results from the articulation of two logics which are incompatible in the last instance and that there is no way in which they could be perfectly reconciled. This is why the liberal-democratic regime has constantly been the locus of struggles

which have provided the driving force of historical political developments. The tension between its two components can only be temporarily stabilized through pragmatic negotiations between political forces which always establish the hegemony of one of them. Until recently, the existence of contending forces was openly recognized and it is only nowadays, when the very idea of a possible alternative to the existing order has been discredited, that the stabilization realized under the hegemony of neoliberalism -with its very specific interpretation of what rights are important and non-negotiable- is practically unchallenged.

Once it is granted that the tension between equality and liberty cannot be reconciled and that there can only be contingent hegemonic forms of stabilization of their conflict, it becomes clear that, once the very idea of an alternative to the existing configuration of power disappears, what disappears also is the very possibility of a legitimate form of expression for the resistances against the dominant power relations. The status quo has become naturalized and made into the way 'things really are'. This is of course what has happened with the present Zeitgeist, the so-called 'third way', which is no more than the justification by social democrats of their capitulation to a neoliberal hegemony whose power relations they will not challenge, limiting themselves to making some little adjustments in order to help people cope with what is seen as the ineluctable fate of 'globalization'.

I want to stress that my aim in the essays collected in this volume is at the same time political and theoretical. From the political standpoint what guides me is the conviction that the unchallenged hegemony of neoliberalism represents a threat for democratic institutions. Neo-liberal dogmas about the inviolable rights of property, the all-encompassing virtues of the market and the dangers of interfering with its logics constitute nowadays the 'common sense' in liberal-democratic societies and they are having a profound impact on the left, as many left parties are moving to the right and euphemistically redefining themselves as 'centre-left'. In a very similar way, Blair's 'third way' and Schroder's 'neue Mitte', both inspired by Clinton's strategy of 'triangulation', accept the terrain established by their neo-liberal predecessors. Unable -or unwilling- to visualize an alternative to the present hegemonic configuration, they advocate a form of politics which pretends to be located 'beyond left and right', categories which are presented as outdated. Their objective is the creation of a 'consensus at the centre', declared to be the only type of politics adapted to the new information society, all those

who oppose their 'modernizing' project being dismissed as 'forces of conservatism'. However, as I show in Chapter 5, when we scratch behind their rhetoric, we quickly realize that in fact they have simply given up the traditional struggle of the left for equality. Under the pretence of rethinking and updating democratic demands, their calls for 'modernization', 'flexibility' and 'responsibility' disguise their refusal to consider the demands of the popular sectors which are excluded from their political and societal priorities. Worse even, they are rejected as 'anti- democratic', 'retrograde' and as remnants of a thoroughly discredited 'old left' project. In this increasingly 'one-dimensional' world, in which any possibility of transformation of the relations of power has been erased, it is not surprising that right- wing populist parties are making significant inroads in several countries. In many cases they are the only ones denouncing the 'consensus at the centre' and trying to occupy the terrain of contestation deserted by the left. Particularly worrying is the fact that many sectors of the working classes feel that their interests are better defended by those parties than by social democrats. Having lost faith in the traditional democratic process, they are an easy target for the demagogues of the right.

The political situation just described. characterized by the celebration of the values of a consensual politics of the centre, is what informs my theoretical questioning. This is why I put special emphasis on the negative consequences of envisaging the ideal of democracy as the realization of a 'rational consensus' and on the concomitant illusion that left and right have ceased to be pertinent categories for democratic politics. I am convinced, contrary to the claims of third way theorists, that the blurring of the frontiers between left and right, far from being an advance in a democratic direction, is jeopardizing the future of democracy.

Responda las siguientes consignas **utilizando únicamente la información suministrada en el texto:**

- 1) Explique en qué consiste la paradoja democrática y qué procesos le dan origen según la autora.
- 2) Proporcione detalles acerca de los posibles efectos de la paradoja democrática sobre las democracias contemporáneas.

- 3) Caracterice el concepto de «consenso de centro» según lo desarrolla la autora y explique cómo se articula con la construcción de sentido común en las democracias liberales.
- 4) Desarrolle los corrimientos y transformaciones generados por el consenso de centro en el espectro político.