

NORA

Nordic Journal of Women's Studies

2004
Number 3
Volume 12

Gender and power 2

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Gender and power in a post-nationalist European Union

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ABSTRACT. The notion of the "new" European identity as a multicultural social space within the framework of the European Union is controversial to say the least, especially in the Euro-sceptical context of the Nordic countries. The EU is positioned simultaneously as a major player within the global economy and as a new experiment in governance. The European Union is seen by its opponents as the contemporary variation on the historical theme of a self-appointed centre which universalizes its own reading of "civilization". It also constitutes, however, a solid social democratic and hence progressive project which counteracts the aggressive neo-liberalism of USA on a number of key issues (privacy, telecommunication, genetically modified food and the environment). I want to argue on philosophical grounds that the project of the European Union makes European identity into a contested notion not only among the member states but also within them. This process of revision of identity triggers contradictory reactions. Not the least contradictory is the simultaneous celebration of transnational spaces on the one hand, and the resurgence of hyper-nationalisms at the micro-level: regional and even more local. The global city and Fortress Europe stand face-to-face (Sassen 1995). In such a context, I want to defend a process of "becoming minoritarian" of Europe as a way of by-passing Eurocentrism (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). My arguments rest on historical as well as theoretical grounds: the project of the European Union originates from the acceptance of the decline of nationalism—it is a post-nationalist project which has the potential to open a new era in European



self-reflection. I also want to explore the implications of this project within the feminist agenda on citizenship.

Against nationalism: the becoming minoritarian of Europe

My arguments to defend the notion of a post-nationalist European space are twofold: on the one hand political and on the other historical. Let us start with the political aspects. Next to the widespread criticism of the EU as lacking transparency and democracy (e.g. the June Movement in Denmark and the other Euro-sceptical movements) two broad anti-European political coalitions can be identified. The first comes from the nationalist and authoritarian Right. This position is nostalgic and reactionary and views the project of the European Union as a threat to local identities, producing a nationalistic, xenophobic and often racist climate. As Stuart Hall put it, the great resistance against the European Union, as well as the American suspicion of it, is a defensive response to overcoming the reality of European nation-states (Hall 1987; 1990). The short-range effect of this anti-European position is nationalistic paranoia and xenophobic fears. According to the paradox of simultaneous globalization and fragmentation, which is characteristic of late post-modernity, the law of excluded middle does not hold: one thing and its opposite can simultaneously be the case (Braidotti 2002; Appadurai 1994). Thus, the redefinition of European boundaries coincides with the resurgence of micro-nationalisms at all levels in Europe today. Unification coexists with the closing down of borders; the common European citizenship and the common currency coexist with increasing internal fragmentation and regionalism; a new, allegedly post-nationalist identity, has to coexist with the return of xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism (Benhabib 1999). The disintegration of the Soviet empire marks simultaneously the

triumph of the advanced market economy and the return of tribal ethnic wars of the most archaic kind. Globalization means both homogenization and extreme power differences (Eisenstein 1999).

Strong political opposition to the EU is also voiced, however, by the nostalgic Left, which seems to miss the topological foundations for international working class solidarity. The cosmopolitan tradition of socialism militates against the European dimension: solidarity with the Third World always carries politically correct consensus, whereas an interest in European matters is often dismissed as vain and self-obsessive. Speaking as a left-wing feminist intellectual, I must say that the Left has often been unable to react with energy and vision to the historical evidence that is the dislocation of European supremacy and the coming of the American empire (Hardt and Negri 2000). The Left is also slow in understanding the non-dialectical and schizophrenic nature of advanced capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari 1972; 1980). The feminist, pacifist and anti-racist movements have a great responsibility in drawing more lucid and relevant cartographies of contemporary power relations, in such a way as to reject nationalism and nationalist arguments. In European history, in the North as in the South, nationalism has bred only contempt, violence and intolerance. It was to be rejected completely and without reserve.

Let me now turn to the historical arguments in defence of my post-nationalist thesis. Historically, the project of the European Union originates in the aftermath of Fascism and Nazism after the disaster of World War II. The moral and political bankruptcy of European identity was an effect of the holocaust perpetuated against the Jewish and the Roma populations, as well as the persecution of homosexuals and communists by the Nazi and Fascist regimes.

The life and work of Altiero Spinelli (Spinelli 1992; 1998) testifies to this, as does his wife Ursula Hirschmann (Spinelli 1979; Hirschmann 1993) and Ursula's own brother Albert

Hirschman who left illuminating accounts of this period (Hirschman 1945; 1994). The EU is consequently grounded in anti-Fascism and in anti-militarism (Spinelli and Rossi 1998); it was imposed on the European nation-states as a punishment for two Franco-German wars that spilled over into global wars. For the Allied occupation forces after the second world war, the new European community also played a more conservative role: it aimed at streamlining the reconstruction of Europe's war-torn economy, in opposition to the Soviet-dominated countries of the East, and thus it was a major pawn in cold war politics.

The two branches of my argument converge upon a single conclusion: that "the European Union" today means a site of possible political resistance against nationalism, xenophobia and racism. These bad habits are endemic to the old imperial Europe and are repeated today by the nationalist opponents of the EU, whether they belong to the Right or the Left of the political spectrum. For me the issue of European identity no longer coincides with the question of the European Union, but rather constitutes a rupture from it and a transformation. The scholarship reflects this double-track: there is far more work on European identity as such, than on the European Union. Feminists especially shine by their absence from the discussions on the post-nationalist project of the EU. In my work, I connect the project of the post-nationalist European Union to the philosophical theory of nomadic subjectivity as a process of "becoming minoritarian". This process entails the critique of the "centre"—Euro-centric, masculinist, heterosexist—which was initiated by the post-structuralist generation (Foucault 1977; Deleuze and Guattari 1972; 1980).

Let me explore the philosophical implications of this view of Europe as a post-nationalist project. Nationalism in European history goes hand in hand with the self-appointed mission of the Europeans to act as the centre, i.e. their universalistic pretension. Europe as a world-power has practiced a sort of metaphysical cannibalism or consumption of others. These constitutive "others" are the specular

complement of the subject of modernity. They are: the woman; the ethnic or racialized other; and the natural environment, including animals, plants or forests. They constitute respectively: the second sex or sexual complement of Man; the coloured, racialized or marked other that allows the Europeans to pass off their whiteness as the defining trait of humanity; and the physical environment against which technology will be pitched and developed. These "others" are of crucial importance to the constitution of the identity of the Same: they are structurally connected to it—albeit by negation. One cannot move without the other, therefore the redefinition of European identity intrinsically poses the question of the social and discursive status of "difference", both in the sense of sexual difference and that of ethnic diversity.

The project of becoming minoritarian of Europe involves a process of consciousness-raising, which in turn expresses the critique of the self-appointed missionary role of Europe as the alleged centre of the world. It also promotes a re-grounding of this pretentious and false universalism into a more situated, local perspective. Feminist epistemologists, especially Genevieve Lloyd (1985), Sandra Harding (1991) and Donna Haraway (1990a), have produced some of the most significant critiques of the false universalism of the European subject of knowledge. They have also offered alternative accounts of both subjectivity and of an enlarged sense of scientific objectivity. Such a dislocation of white epistemic superiority (Harding 1993) amounts to a re-grounding of Europe as one of the many peripheries in the world today; which is not a way of avoiding our responsibilities, but the better to situate them and thus to confront them in their concrete particularity. Such a critique also marks a significant intersection between feminist and post-structuralist concerns.

The politics of location as method and as strategy

The politics of location is the method and the strategy which was developed and later theorized by feminists to account for consciousness-raising (Rich 1987). It is also a way of making sense of diversity among women in such a way as to avoid essentialism, while pursuing the critique of the understood as the binary opposite of the phallogocentric subject. Epistemological and political accountability is understood as the practice that consists in unveiling the power locations which one inevitably inhabits as the site of one's identity and subject-position. The practice of accountability (for one's embodied and embedded locations) as a relational, collective activity of undoing power differentials is linked to two crucial notions: memory and narratives. They activate the process of putting into words, that is to say bringing into symbolic representation, that which—being so familiar—escapes self-consciousness and only be empowered in interaction with others.

A "location" in fact, is not a self-appointed and self-designed subject-position. It is a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatio-temporal territory. The "politics of location" consequently supports the process of consciousness-raising and results in a political awakening (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). "Politics of locations" are cartographies of power which rest on a form of self-criticism, a critical, genealogical self-narrative; they are relational and outside-directed. These "embodied" accounts illuminate and transform our knowledge of ourselves and of the world. Thus, black women's texts and experiences make white women see the limitations of our locations, truths and discourses. Feminist knowledge is an interactive and self-reflexive process that relies on networks of exchanges. It brings out aspects of our existence, especially our own implication with power, that we had not noticed before (Mohanty 1992). In Deleuzian languages, it "de-territorializes" us, i.e. it

estranges us from the familiar, the intimate, the known and casts an external light upon it; in Foucault's language, it is micro-politics, and it starts with the embodied self. Feminists, however, knew this well before either Foucault or Deleuze theorized it in their philosophy.

A range of new, alternative narratives for the feminist subject-position has emerged in the global landscapes of post-modernity. They are contested, multilayered and internally contradictory subject-positions, which does not make them any less ridden with power-relation. They are hybrid and in-between social categories for whom traditional descriptions in terms of sociological categories such as "marginals", "migrants", or "minorities" are, as Saskia Sassen suggests, grossly inadequate (Sassen 1994). Where "figurations" of alternative feminist subjectivity, such as the womanist (Walker 1984); the lesbian (Wittig 1992); the cyborg (Haraway 1990b); the inappropriate(d) other (Minh-Ha 1989); the "eccentric subject" (De Lauretis 1990); the mestiza (Anzaldúa 1987); the nomadic feminist (Braidotti 1994) differ from classical "metaphors" is precisely in calling into play a sense of accountability for one's locations. They express materially embedded cartographies and as such are self-reflexive and not parasitic upon a process of metaphorization of "others". The figurations that emerge from this process act as the spotlight that illuminates aspects of one's practice which were blind spots before. By extension, a new figuration of the subject (nomadic, cyborg, black, etc.) function like conceptual *personae*. As such, it is no metaphor, but rather as cognitive maps, i.e. materially embedded and embodied accounts of one's power-relations. On the creative level it expresses the rate of change, transformation or affirmative deconstruction of the power one inhabits. "Figurations" materially embodied stages of metamorphosis of a subject position towards all that the phallogocentric system does *not* want it to become (Braidotti 2002).

From the angle of "different constitutive others" this inflationary production of different differences simultaneously expresses the logic

of capitalist proliferation and exploitation, but also the emerging subjectivities of positive and self-defined others. It all depends on one's locations or situated perspectives. Far from seeing this as a form of relativism, I see it as an embedded and embodied form of enfolded materialism. Feminist subject-figurations resist the uncritical reproduction of Sameness on a molecular, global or planetary scale by approaching differences in a non-dialectical and multilayered framework which stresses their subversive potential.

The work on power, difference and the politics of location offered by post-colonial and anti-racist feminist thinkers like Gayatri Spivak (1987), Stuart Hall (1992), Paul Gilroy (1987) and many others who are familiar with the European situation helps us illuminate the paradoxes of the present. One of the most significant effects of late post-modernity in Europe is the phenomenon of transculturality, or cultures clashing in a pluriethnic or multicultural European social space. World-migration—a huge movement of population from periphery to centre, working on a worldwide scale of “scattered hegemonies”—has challenged the claim to the alleged cultural homogeneity of European nation states and of the incipient European Union. Present-day Europe is struggling with multiculturalism at a time of increasing racism and technophobia (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). The paradoxes, power-dissymmetries and fragmentations of the present historical contest rather require that we shift the political debates from the issue of differences between cultures, to differences *within* the same culture. These are the shifting grounds on which periphery and centre confront each other, with a new level of complexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking.

Feminist theory argues that if it is the case that a socio-cultural mutation is taking place in the direction of a multi-ethnic, multi-media society, then the transformation cannot affect only the pole of “the others”. It must equally dislocate the position and the prerogative of “the same”, the former centre. It is not only a change

in the representation of the subjects, but in the very structure of subjectivity, in the fabric of the symbolic and the syntax of social relations. Consequently, the customary standard-bearers of Euro-centric phallogocentrism no longer hold in a civil society that is, among others, sexed female *and* male, multicultural and not inevitably Christian. More than ever, the question of social transformation begs that of representation: what can the male, white, Christian monotheistic symbolic do for the new emerging subjects? The challenges, as well as the anxieties evoked by this question need to be assessed critically. Feminist theory is a very relevant and useful navigational tool in these stormy times of locally enacted, global phenomena, i.e. “G-local” changes.¹

The point is that we live in a world which is organized along multiple axes of mobility, circulation, flows of people and commodities (Cresswell 1997). Displacement is a central feature of the post-modern era, as critics like Probyn also pointed out (Probyn 1990). As Ernesto Laclau also argued, the point is that processes of hybridization and nomadic identities are neither marginal, nor self-chosen phenomena (Laclau 1995). It is rather the case, as Dahrendorf has argued, that advanced capitalism itself functions by organizing constant flows and displacements, in such a way as to erode its own foundations (Dahrendorf 1990). The crisis of the nation state in the age of transnational capital flow is a significant case in question (Mouffe 1994); contemporary technologies contribute to accelerate this trend (Castells 1996).

Let me, however, make one point perfectly clear: I would never want to argue that rootlessness and homelessness, or constant mobility and displacement are universal features. On the contrary, I do take shifts, mutations and processes of change as a key feature of the particular historical period we are going through. Precisely because of this, social critics need to be very situated in their approach to the analysis of the new subject-positions which have become available in post-industrial

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times. The differences in degrees, types, kinds and modes of mobility and—even more significantly—of non-mobility need to be mapped out with precision and sensitivity. This cartographic accuracy is made necessary by the fact that non-unitary subject positions, hybrids, nomads and cyborgs are key elements of our historicity. They function as generic terms for the indexation of different degrees of access and entitlement to subject positions in the historical era of post-modernity. They situate subjects in one of the many poly-located centres which weave together the global economy. Power is the key-issue, and mobility is a term that indexes access to it. As such, power relations are internally contradictory and they require suitable politically invested cartographies that account for them.

Resisting against Fortress Europe

I want to argue therefore that as a project, the European Union needs to be framed by discussions of global power relations. It also has to be worked through by the method and the strategy of the politics of locations. As a progressive project, it has to do with the rejection of false universalism that historically has made Europe into the home of nationalism, colonialism and Fascism—but also of human rights and democratic ideals. This is an attempt to come to terms with the paradoxes and internal contradictions of our own historical predicament as “post-Europe Europeans”, much as gender theory has had to deal with the fragments, the deconstruction and reconstruction of the “post-Woman women” in the feminist process of transformation (Braidotti 1994; 2002). This is a plea for lucidity and for embedded and embodied perspectives. We need both political strategies and imaginary figurations that are adequate to our historicity.

This is, however, only one side of the paradoxical coin of European deconstruction in the age of the European Union. The other

side, simultaneously true and yet absolutely contradictory, is the danger of recreating a sovereign centre through the new European federation. That the two be simultaneously the case makes European identity into one of the most contested areas of political and social philosophy in our world at the moment. The reactive tendency towards a sovereign sense of the Union is also known as the “Fortress Europe” syndrome, which has been extensively critiqued by feminists and anti-racists such as Helma Lutz and Anne Phoenix (Lutz et al. 1996), Avtar Brah (1993), Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989), and Philomena Essed (Essed 1991). They warn us against the danger of replacing the former Euro-centrism with a new “Europ-ism”, i.e. the belief in an ethnically pure Europe.

Avtar Brah’s analysis empowers diasporic and hybrid identities as a challenge to any assumption of monoculturalism in the new Europe. Diaspora is a space of transition and exchange which defines as much the indigenous people as the nomadic subjects of the post/colonial world order. Brah defines diasporic identities as being both about roots and routes, that is to say: “processes of multi-locationality across geographical, cultural and psychic boundaries” (Brah 1996, 194). These are accentuated under the impact of the new information technologies, which dislocate the relationship between the local and the global and thus complicate the idea of multi-locality. Brah adopts the feminist politics of location as the kind of cognitive mapping that can best do justice to the new web of diasporic identities and other new forms of ethnicities emerging in the new world order.

One concrete way to apply the feminist politics of location to the political analysis of gender and ethnicity relations in the new Europe is by singling out the issue of whiteness. Let me explain. For people who inherit the European region “the post”-condition translates concretely into the end of the myth of cultural homogeneity. As Michael Walzer has argued this the foundational political myth in Europe, much as multiculturalism is the central myth in

the United States (Walzer 1992). Of course, European history at any point in time provides ample evidence to the contrary: waves of migrations from the East and the South make a mockery of any claim to ethnic or cultural homogeneity in Europe, while the persistent presence of Jewish and Muslim citizens challenges the identification of Europe with Christianity. Nonetheless, the myth of cultural homogeneity is crucial to the tale of European nationalism.

In our era, these myths are being exposed and exploded into questions related to entitlement and agency. Thus, the European Union is faced with the issue: can one be European and black or Muslim (Gilroy 1987)? I want to argue that whiteness is also called into play. One of the radical implications of the project of the European Union is the possibility of giving a specific location, and consequently historical embeddedness or memory—to anti-racist whites. This is quite a feat because, until recently in Europe, only white supremacists, naziskins and other Fascists actually had a theory about qualities that are inherent to white people. Like all Fascists, they are biological and cultural essentialists. Apart from this, whiteness was, quite simply, invisible, just not seen, at least, not by whites. It took the work of black writers and thinkers to expose whiteness as a political issue: Toni Morrison and bell hooks came along and painted us in (Morrison 1992; hooks 1994).

In his analysis of the representation of whiteness as an ethnic category in mainstream films, Richard Dyer defines it as “an emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death” (Dyer 1993). Being the norm, it is invisible, as if natural, inevitable or the ordinary way to do things (Ware 1992). The source of the representational power of white is the propensity to be everything and nothing, whereas black, of course, is always marked off as a colour. The effect of this structured invisibility and of the process of naturalization of whiteness is that it masks itself off into a “colourless multicolouredness”: white contains all other colours. This insight is strengthened

philosophically by the work of Michel Foucault on the Panopticon—the void that lies at the heart of the system and which defines the contour of both social and symbolic visibility (Foucault 1977; Young 1990). Deleuze and Guattari also comment on the fact that any dominant notion such as masculinity or race has no positive definition: the prerogative of being dominant means that a concept gets defined oppositionally, by casting outwards upon others the marks of oppression or marginalization (Deleuze and Guattari 1972; 1980). Virginia Woolf had already commented on this aspect of the logic of domination when she asserted that what matters is not so much that He, the male, should be superior, so long as She, the Other, be clearly defined as inferior (Woolf 1943). There is no dominant concept other than as a term to index and police access and participation to entitlements and powers. Conceptually, the invisibility of the dominant concepts is also the expression of their unsustainability. Politically, however, this makes them all the more effective in their murderous intents against the many others on whose structural exclusion they rest.

The process of naturalization or invisibility has also methodological implications, namely that whiteness is very difficult to analyze critically. It tends to break down into subcategories of whiteness: Irishness, Italianness, Jewishness, etc. It follows therefore that non-whites have a much clearer perception of whiteness than whites. Just think of bell hook's important work on whiteness as terror and as death-giving force and feminist critiques of whiteness in mythology and fairy tales like Snow White (hooks 1995). The reverse, however, is not the case: black and other ethnic minorities do not need this specular logic in order to have a location of their own.

The experience of white European immigrants tends to confirm the lethal unsubstantiality of whiteness. Cultural identity being external and retrospective, it gets defined for Europeans in the confrontation with others—usually black—peoples. This was the experience of Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants in countries like the USA, Canada

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and Australia. Their "whiteness" emerged oppositionally, as a distancing factor from both the dominant Northern protestant groups and from the natives and blacks. Feminist critics like Frankenberg and Brodtkin Sacks have analysed this phenomenon of a "whitening" process by which Euro-immigrants—especially Jews and Italians—were constructed as "whitened" citizens in the USA (Frankenberg 1994a; 1994b; Brodtkin 1994). The extent to which this kind of "whitened" identity is illusory as it is racist, can be seen by how divided the diasporic Euro-immigrant communities actually are in the "new" world, all in their respective ghettos, antagonistic to each other and locked in mutual suspicion. But all are equally "whitened" by the gaze of the colonizer, bent on pitching them against the black population. It consequently follows that, by learning to view their subject position as racialized white people, we can work towards anti-racist forms of whiteness, or at least anti-racist strategies to rework whiteness.

My political strategy to rework whiteness is firstly to situate it in the geo-historical space of Europe and within the political project of the European Union. This amounts to historicizing it and de-mystifying its allegedly "natural" locations. The next step, following the method of feminist politics of location, is to analyse it critically, to revisit it by successive deconstructive repetitions that aim at emptying out the different layers of this complex identity, excavating it till it opens out to the new. I want to nomadize the claim of European identity as an open and multilayered project, not as a fixed or given essence. A cultural identity of this kind is a project which turns historical contradictions into spaces of critical resistance to hegemonic identities of all kinds.

In other words, I want to re-locate European identity, so as to undo its hegemonic tendencies. I refer to this kind of identity as "nomadic". Being a nomadic European subject means to be in transit within different identity-formations, but sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibility for it. The key words in this project are: "accountability" and the "strategic re-location of whiteness". It is also a

way of positing the "becoming minoritarian of Europe" by dispelling the privilege of invisibility that was conferred to Europe as an alleged centre of the world. By assuming full responsibility for the partial perspective of its own location, a minoritarian European space opens up a possible political strategy for those who inhabit this particular centre of power in a globalized world marked by scattered hegemonies, and hence no longer dominated by European power alone.

I want to describe the project of developing a post-nationalist understanding of European identity and of its flexible citizenship forms as a great historical chance for Europeans to become more intelligent of our own history and more self-critical in a productive sense. Nietzsche argued earlier in the previous century that many Europeans no longer feel at home in Europe (Nietzsche 1966). Many would want to argue today that those who do not identify with Europe in the sense of the centre are ideally suited to the task of reframing Europe by making it accountable for a history in which Fascism, imperialism and domination play a central role. Nomadic European subjects lay the post-nationalist foundations for a multilayered and flexible practice of European citizenship in the frame of the new European Union.

On flexible citizenship²

I would relate this post-nationalistic sense of identity to the political notion of flexible citizenship. The focus is on the area of citizenship and multicultural identity in the framework of the "new" European Union (Ferreira et al. 1998).

A radical restructuring of European identity as post-nationalistic can concretely be translated into a set of "flexible forms of citizenship" that would allow for all "others", all kinds of hybrid citizens to acquire legal status in what would otherwise deserve the label of "Fortress Europe". This mode of citizenship can also be described as "temporary". It dismantles the us/them binary in such a way as to undo a strong

and fixed notion of European citizenship in favour of a functionally differentiated network of affiliations and loyalties. This allows the citizens of the member states of the European Union to disconnect the three elements discussed above—nationality, citizenship and national identity—in favour of multiple belongings (Sassen 1995). According to Ulrich Preuss, a European notion of citizenship so disengaged from national foundations lays the ground for a new kind of civil society, beyond the boundaries of any single nation-state. Because such a notion of “alienage” would become an integral part of citizenship in the European Union, Preuss argues that all European citizens would end up being “privileged foreigners” (Preuss 1996, 551). In other words, they would function together without reference to a centralized and homogeneous sphere of political power (Preuss 1995, 280). Potentially, this notion of citizenship could therefore lead to a new concept of politics, which would no longer be bound to the nation-state. Of course, this notion of European citizenship is only potential and highly contested at the national level, by both reactionary nostalgic forces and Third-World-obsessed leftist political groups. I see it instead as the most honest and pragmatic way to develop the progressive potential of the European Union and also of accounting for the effects of globalization upon us all. These effects boil down to one central idea: the end of pure and steady identities, creolization, hybridization, a multicultural Europe, within which “new” Europeans could take their place alongside others (Bhavnani 1992).

In her recent work on European citizenship, Benhabib supports this case and interrogates critically the disjunction between the concepts of nation, the state and cultural identity (Benhabib 2002). Solidly grounded in her theory of communicative ethics, Benhabib stipulates “norms of universal respect and egalitarian reciprocity as guiding principles of human interaction” (Benhabib 2002, 11). She consequently works towards the elaboration of new rules of global democracy for within a

multicultural horizon. A self-professed Kantian cosmopolitan, Benhabib argues forcefully that “democratic citizenship can be exercised across national boundaries and in transnational contexts” citing the European Union as an example (Benhabib 2002, 183).

Of great importance in this respect is the work of Etienne Balibar on Europe as a transnational space of mediation and exchange (Balibar 2001; 2002). This new European identity is internally differentiated and hence non-unitary and committed to transcultural hybrid exchanges. It is a situated perspective based on multiple border crossings, confrontation with shifting frontiers and borders, and a deep commitment to pacifism and human rights. I have stressed elsewhere, in non-English language publications, the relevance of this vision of the European Union for the feminist project of situating the critique of gender and power in the lived reality of our present geo-political locations (Braidotti 2002; 2003a; 2003b). We need situated European perspectives on gender, feminist politics and social theory. This is a way of thinking locally and taking full accountability for the new transnational European space. Becoming Europeans in this critical mode is a process of active re-grounding of citizenship according to a more flexible model.

A new social imaginary

Communities are also imaginary institutions made of affects and desires (Anderson 1983). Homi Bhaba, for instance, stresses the fact that common ideas of “nation” are to a large extent imaginary tales, which project a reassuring but nonetheless illusory sense of unity over the disjointed, fragmented and often incoherent range of internal regional and cultural differences that make up a national identity (Bhaba 1990; 1994). Post-structuralist and anti-racist feminists have moreover developed a sceptical attitude towards the idea of unitary identity. We have also become painfully aware of the extent to which the legitimating tales of nationhood in the West have been constructed

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over the body of women, as well as in the crucible of imperial and colonial masculinity.

The project of developing a new kind of post-nationalist identity is related to the dis-identification from established, nation-bound identities. To become accountable for such a history requires means of revisiting it, acknowledging it, and understanding the complicity between "difference" and "exclusion" in the European mind-set. Repetitions are the road to creating positive redefinitions, in a progress of creative deconstruction. This dis-location can lead to a positive and affirmative re-location of European identities following the feminist politics of locations. Throughout this process I have stressed both the need for and the difficulties involved in developing an adequate European social imaginary for this kind of subject-position. There is no denying that such an enterprise includes a large sense of loss and is not without pain. No process of consciousness-raising can ever be painless. Migrants know this very well and my own experience in Australia has taught me to what an extent the process of dis-identification is linked to the pain of loss. This is not, however, the pathetic expression of a nostalgic yearning for a return to the past, but rather a mature, sobering experience, similar to the loss of illusions and of self-delusions of classical Greek tragedies.

A post-nationalist sense of European identity and of flexible citizenship does not come easy and in some ways is even a counter-intuitive idea. It requires an extra effort in order to come into being. It raises the question of how to change deeply embedded habits of our imagination: how can such in-depth transformation be enacted? This question is made all the more urgent by the extent to which we are already living in post-nationalist ways and in a post-nationalistic social space. This is due partly to the obvious effects of globalization and the conformism and homogenization of cultures due to telecommunication. It is also related, however, to the impact of the European Union on the legal, economic, cultural, educational and

scientific structures in which most dwellers in Europe function nowadays.

The problem with both the impact of post-nationalistic structures and social spaces on the one hand and the complex reactions they engender on the other is that we already live this way, but when it comes to thinking about it, our mental schemes rail-road us back towards traditional ways of representation that do not do justice to the paradoxes and complexities of the day. What we are lacking is a social imaginary that adequately reflects the social realities which we are already experiencing, of a post-nationalistic sense of European identity. There is a shortage on the part of the social imaginary, which both feeds upon and supports the political timidity and the resistances that are being moved against the European political project. More work is needed on the role of contemporary global media in both colonizing and stimulating the social imaginary of global cultures (Hall 1992; Shohat and Stam 1994; Gilroy 2000; Braidotti 2003a; 2003b).

At least some of the difficulty involved is due to the lack of a specifically European—in the sense of European Union public debate, as Habermas put it in his critique of the absence of a European public sphere (Habermas 1992). This is reflected in the absence of what I would call a European social imaginary. Thinkers as varied as Passerini (1998), Meny (2000) and Morin (1987) all signal this problem, in different ways. Passerini laments the lack of an emotional attachment to the European dimension on the part of the citizens of the social space that is Europe. For Meny the problem is rather the lack of imagination and of visionary force on the part of those who are in charge of propelling politically the European Union. For Edgar Morin, Europe is ill-loved and somewhat unwanted, "une pauvre vieille petite chose" (Morin 1987, 23); like a cherished, but intensely unsexy old aunt.

My question therefore becomes: how do you develop such a new European social imaginary? I think that such a notion is a project, not a given; nonetheless, this does not make it Utopian in the sense of over-idealistic. It is even

the contrary: it is a virtual social reality which can be actualized by a joint endeavour on the part of active, conscious and desiring citizens. If it this may be Utopian at all, it is only in the positive sense of Utopia: the necessary dose of dream-like vision without which no social project can take off and gather support.

Something along these lines is expressed with great passion by Edgar Morin, when he describes his becoming European as the awakening of his consciousness about the new peripheral role of Europe in the post-World War II era. This occurred after years of indifference to Europe, in the tradition of Marxist cosmopolitanism and international proletarian solidarity. By his own admission, Edgar Morin overcame his own mistrust for the European dimension of both thinking and political activity in the late 1970s, when, like most of his generation, he took distance from the unfulfilled promises of the Marxist Utopia. This sobering experience made him see to what an extent the new world-wide binary opposition USSR/USA had dramatically dislocated the sources of planetary power away from Europe (Morin 1987).

This is the paradox that lies at the heart of the quest for a new, post-nationalist redefinition of European identity: it becomes thinkable as an entity at the exact historical time when it has ceased to be operational as a social or symbolic reality. The process of becoming Europeans entails the end of fixed Eurocentric identities and it thus parallels the becoming nomadic of subjectivity. The liberatory potential of this process is equally proportional to the imaginary and political efforts it requires of us all. The recognition of the new multilayered, transcultural and post-nationalist idea of Europe in this case would only be the premise to the collective development of a new sense of accountability for the specific slice of world periphery that we happen to inhabit.

Let me make it perfectly clear, however, that this very definition of nomadic subjects is spoken from and speaks of the specific location I have chosen to make myself accountable for. It is an embedded European account of my own

traditions or genealogies. In other words, it is only one of many possible locations which may apply to some of the people who situate themselves—in terms of genealogical consciousness and the related forms of accountability—for the kind of power relations that go with the continent of Europe. This is neither the only nor is it the best of all possible locations. It merely happens to be the cartography that I acquired and chose to be accountable for. I want to present this kind of embodied genealogical accountability as my contribution to our discussions on gender and power. Through the pain of loss and disenchantment, just like “post-Woman women” have moved away from compulsory gender dichotomies towards a redefinition of being-gendered-in-the-world, “post-Eurocentric Europeans” may be able to find enough creativity and moral stamina to grab this historical chance to become just Europeans in the post-nationalist sense of the term.

NOTES

1. I owe this witty formulation to the discussions with my colleagues in the European Socrates Thematic Network ATHENA. See the website: www.athena2.org
2. This term has gained widespread acceptance; I first read it in Aihwa Ong's work on Chinese migrants (Ong 1993).

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