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INTRODUCTION: PERVERSE POLITICS? FEMINISM, ANTI-IMPERIALISM, MULTIPLICITY

Ann Shola Orloff, Raka Ray and Evren Savcı[☆]

Gender is constituted politically and politics is gendered to the core. While these claims are not contentious, they are not as central to gender scholarship as they once were, or as they should be. The papers collected here – initially presented at the 2012 and 2013 meetings of the Social Science History Association – make a compelling case for this emphasis (see also [Bedford & Rai, 2010](#)). We are inspired by three decades of research that has taught us, first, that gender relations are constituted jointly with other relations of power, difference, and inequality – nationality, sexuality, class, “race,” religion and second, that gender is not simply about the systematic and patterned production of men and women out of differently sexed bodies or their embodied and gendered subjectivities – but also about practices and ideologies that work across the international political economy, global cultures, and formal and informal political institutions, both local and national.

[☆]The authors are equal co-authors and the names are in alphabetical order.

These lessons take on particular importance at a moment when the character of gendered politics across a number of sites is undergoing significant shifts. In many parts of the globe, formal exclusions and discrimination are outlawed, gender hierarchies have been undermined, and women are appearing among economic, political, and other elites to an unprecedented degree, even as average levels of wages and other valued goods still reflect strong patterns of gendered inequalities. Marked global transformations of economy and politics, reflecting the spread of, and contestations against, neoliberal policies and ideologies, include the emergence of new global discourses about the “rise of women” and calls to re-embed capitalism with new attention to problems of reproduction (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997). These transformations have important implications for gender relations and feminist politics.

The complexity of our present moment poses considerable analytic and political challenges. But even beyond this complexity, broader intellectual shifts toward destabilizing categories and identities, and toward historical contingency, have undermined the certainties that once allowed analysts and political actors to make simplifying assumptions and claims about interests, political processes, and outcomes, leading to the possibility of what we call “perverse politics.”

ON PERVERSITY

We identify “perverse politics” as an element of the complicated phenomena we observe. The perversity of the political can refer to two things. First, at the level of policies and institutions, there are unexpected outcomes and unanticipated consequences, especially of the “ironic” variety. We refer to this as “perverse policy outcomes.” Second, in civil society, there are individual and collective contrariness, unruliness and resistance to guidance among political actors – going counter to what is expected or desired. We refer to this as “perverse politics.” While acknowledging the importance of the first, this volume focuses on and elaborates the second – “perverse politics.”

Across the papers collected here, the authors identify “perverse” actions that include the expressed desire on the part of women to veil, the desire to prioritize unpaid care over paid work, the desire to arm themselves, the refusal to use the language of rights, or an ongoing engagement with “johns.” But in whose eyes do these actions look perverse? We contend that they look

perverse from the still dominant, though contested, point of view of the Western liberal feminisms that emerged out of second-wave women's movements, especially as they have found expression within state institutions and international organizations.¹ Second-wave feminism, taking a kaleidoscopic variety of forms, helped to promote some of the most wide-ranging social, political, economic, and cultural changes in world history – “the world split open” (Rosen, 2000). It was not monolithic, yet predominant tendencies can be discerned: it came into existence, and brought into existence with it, a belief that women constituted a group with distinct interests, whether they knew it or not, that there were political, economic, and social structures in place that blocked gender equality – that, in fact, actually created inequality – and led to the construction of women's psychic structures such that they did not readily see where their interests lay. And it assumed that women in North America, Europe, and the Antipodes had access to a more “unmodified” and pure version of feminism than did women in the “third world” (e.g., MacKinnon, 1987). While second-wave feminisms have been extensively critiqued, and new forms of feminism – third or even fourth waves – have emerged in both the academy and in the wider world, these key principles have been instantiated across a number of sites, including many parts of states and international organizations. Halley (2006) calls this “governance feminism,” the “installation of feminists and feminist ideas in actual legal-institutional power.”² Others claim a more modest and mixed influence for feminists (e.g., Orloff & Palier, 2009; Otto, 2010). But there seems to be a growing sense that feminists engage more significantly with elites now than in the past, and that feminist ideas have spread widely and have been adapted – at best – or appropriated by a wide range of political and corporate elites.

That certain practices, actions, and outcomes appear perverse indicates key gaps in dominant feminist understandings of politics. At their core lies the continuation of the erroneous assumptions of second-wave universalism and a resultant failure to understand the importance of context. These “perversities” underline the fact that political identifications and outcomes are embedded in historically and spatially specific contexts, including within the imperial spaces of the modern world. The power relationships established with colonialism and imperialism endure in changed form, and shape the reception and conception of what are understood to be “western, liberal feminist” claims, goals, modalities (e.g., rights, freedom) – as do local particularities of politics and culture. That which is “perverse” from the point of view of an expansionist second-wave universalizing sensibility can be simply common sense within an alternative political and economic context.

To take a recent example, Nicholas Kristof has gathered a huge following for his recent writings on women in the third world, which unerringly replicate a universalist narrative about gender empowerment (e.g., [Kristof & WuDunn, 2009](#)). His analysis entirely misses the effects of colonialism on gender relations in the various parts of the world it analyzes, thereby presenting as perverse and “cultural” the perceived opposition to “women’s empowerment” in various parts of the global south. It also replicates the 19th century savior mentality where the only active agents of liberation come from the West, where women are the victims and their men the oppressors. In so doing, Kristof both misrecognizes the nature of the crises he discusses and replicates a power equation that is inherited from a colonial view of the world. Because of this, his analysis fits the common sense of the West but may well appear perverse in many parts of the global South.

We turn now to three specific manifestations of perverse politics. The first has to do with the core assumption of true feminist consciousness – that women as a group have interests, whether they realize it or not. Hence other interests appear perverse. The second manifestation stems from the first and addresses the issue of women’s resistance to dominant forms of feminist politics. This eschewing of feminist politics appears perverse. A third manifestation of perverse politics that we discuss is the strange bedfellows that feminist politics have sometimes embraced, notably, political elites dedicated to neoliberal or socially conservative agendas, and the national security state, and the outcomes that stem from such uneasy alliances.

THE SPECTER OF FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS(ES)

Influenced by an economically determinist version of Marxism, the specter of false consciousness underlay the contention that certain actions and ideas were perverse, a feminist version of Thomas Frank’s “What’s the Matter with Kansas?” (2004), if you will.³ These actions and beliefs appeared “perverse” precisely because they went against second-wave feminist understandings of what are seen, unproblematically, as “women’s interests,” as consisting of economic independence achieved through employment, personal autonomy, individual sexual and reproductive freedom, and an equal sharing of domestic labor. This understanding of “women’s interests” was undergirded by a homogenous category of “women” on whose behalf feminism purported to speak ([Butler, 1990](#); [Mohanty, 1988](#)), but also enabled by Western liberal assumptions of what it means to be a subject of freedom.

Critiques of both Marxist and feminist claims about interests and politics, usually debated separately, are not new.⁴ Steedman (1986) wrote brilliantly, in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, about the Tory proclivities of her working-class mother as a way to contest both the views of Thompson (1963) about the formation of the (male) English working class and those of feminists about (middle class) women's interests to show how these views made it impossible to understand the politics of envy, gender, and striving – captured in the yearning of her mother and other working-class women for a “New Look” skirt. Within the United States, many critiqued MacKinnon's (1982) assumption of a common truth to which consciousness raising would lead women, while Collins (2000) questioned the assumptions behind views of mothering held by many white middle-class women and institutionalized in many government programs and Moore (2011) has demonstrated that Black lesbian mothers have a very different definition of “equality” than what at least some forms of Western second-wave feminisms presumed it to be.

Thinking globally, Mohanty (1988, p. 63) questioned the analytical categories that Western feminism operated with, that inevitably worked to create “third world difference” – “that stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all women in those countries.” Understanding feminist scholarship itself as implicated in a power/knowledge matrix, Mohanty (1988, p. 65), in her now famous formulation, questioned the universalizing tendencies of western feminism that positioned itself as the normative referent, and understood third world women as a homogenous Other, who “leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being ‘third world’ (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized etc.)” In other words, precisely because the United States or Europe represent the unquestioned standard against which phenomena are to be compared, others are always already deviant and thus subject to accusations of false consciousness or “backwardness.”⁵ Adding to Mohanty's critique, Saba Mahmood has put pressure on such assumptions as “the belief that human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them, and so on (2005, p. 5).” While women's interests are usually understood to be authentic and expressive of true agency when they are achieved *despite* norms and traditions, Mahmood underlines that self-realization is not an invention of liberalism – it was liberalism which effectively tied self-realization to individual autonomy.

Here, we start to see traces of an analytic slippage: Feminists have rightfully expanded the understanding of interest from pure class interests to other forms of gender and sexualized privileges (and with some feminisms, also racial and colonial privileges) or their lack. An increasingly decontextualized and universalized use of the category “woman,” alluded to above – one that was removed from the social, political, economic relationships – was used to constitute “women’s interests” (Mohanty, 1988). In this way, one of the most problematized Marxist concepts, false consciousness, is taken out of its context of critique of political economy and classed subject formation, and married with a liberal understanding of rights-as-social-justice and women-as-a-reified category. It is this combination which, over time, came to position as “perverse” – *not* the idea that people live in a country without proper economic and social safety nets (welfare, unemployment benefits, universal health insurance) – but that people fail to embrace a Western liberal mode of life as infinitely desirable. In other words, while false consciousness evokes a Marxist understanding of political economy, today, its logic is often used to underline the “perversity” of rejecting the modern, liberal order, and its definitions of equality and freedom.

MULTIPLICITY RATHER THAN PERVERSITY

Despite gender analysts’ awareness in theorizing differences among women across social locations and political or ideological orientations, their studies have not, until recently, paid sufficient attention to the implications of multiplicity for politics. “Intersectionality” analysts, among others, have problematized what is “wanted” by women in different social locations. Yet at times analyses based on social location have been trapped in a socially determinist understanding of political ideas, goals, and discourses (Adams & Padamsee, 2001). For example, the pioneering studies of the “maternalist” politics that helped to find modern social provision for mothers and children in the United States typically focused on the divergence between what women elites and educated professionals wanted and the preferred arrangements of their would-be clients, seen as reflecting their social positions (e.g., Gordon, 1994; Mink, 1995). Others have broken more decisively with social determinism, and opened up the possibility that attachments and goals stem from deep religious feelings, psychic formations and affect, desires for cultural recognition – that are not “understandable” – even as

complexly mediated – within a frame that considers only material conditions. Thus, more recent studies of welfare focusing on (largely women) professionals, political elites, social movement organizations, and clients find varying – and clashing – politically and culturally mediated goals, capacities, and alliances in play (e.g., [Mittelstadt, 2005](#)).

With regard to countries outside of North America and Western Europe, the dominant development paradigm, influenced by a feminism located in the middle classes of those countries, promised that should women be educated and work outside of the home, they could overcome their oppression in patriarchal households and family structures, and at the same time become the agents of social and economic progress. Indeed, belief in the overarching importance of women's empowerment (based on agreement of what such empowerment constituted) through education and work underlie much of Western feminism as well as development theory and practice. Absent from this notion has been the recognition that some groups of women would long for a respite from work, or seek self-realization not through resistance, but in submission to external forms of authority ([Mahmood, 2005](#)). Similarly absent is a recognition that ideologies about the education of ideal mothers and wives have served national interests ([Najmabadi, 1998](#)), that education might not always lead to empowerment, or indeed that empowerment could be perceived as precisely the ability to buy the equivalent of a “New Look” skirt ([Steedman, 1986](#)). Further, this approach not only takes for granted the public/private divide but also presumes that the domestic sphere is clearly and undeniably more oppressive than the public sphere (which is, after all, regulated by states, political organizations, cultural norms and schema, and historically has not been equally accessible to all citizens or subjects) (e.g., [Glenn, 2009](#)). Underlying this, we suggest, is a modernist fantasy that the public sphere is a democratic arena where “equal” relationships of citizenship are realized, as contrasted with the unequal relationships of “backwards” patriarchy thought to predominate in the private sphere. Critical theorists from a range of positions – transnational, third world or global south, feminist, queer, people of color – long have pointed out the violence perpetrated by state institutions and the stratifying dimensions of citizenship (e.g., [Alexander, 1994](#); [Lister, 2003](#); [Reddy, 2011](#); [Scott, 1988](#); [Spade, 2011](#)). When the spheres of citizenship and the political do serve to bring greater equality across divides of gender, race, class, sexuality, it is an unusual political accomplishment.

Once we accept the importance of context then we can see that politics – including feminist politics – is inescapably multiple. We

distinguish ourselves from those who call for a more “inclusive” feminism, since inclusion as a goal implies subjects who are always already included, and who will engage in the act of including the excluded (Butler, 1990). We do not deny the affective and material realities of exclusion from critical political platforms on one hand and from institutions such as citizenship on the other. Yet an exclusive focus on inclusivity in politics in general, and feminism in particular, has stunted conversations about what forms feminist politics might take. We prefer to call for a multiple politics in which we accept that women, including feminists (not that all feminists are women), differ in their political identifications and goals. What makes sense to one set of women – to veil, to engage in sex work – seems “perverse” to another group. And the favor is likely returned: If certain feminists want to make claims in terms of rights, to be uncovered or irreligious, to spurn kinship ties, to practice sexualities in novel ways, to attempt to live lives earlier understood to be masculine in character, they too may be seen as “perverse,” in the eyes of others, and not only traditional, patriarchal elites, but also women advancing claims for gender equality in divergent ways. One solution for those who would unite women and feminists around certain goals – an end to gendered violence, perhaps, or achieving greater regulation of the labor conditions of those who engage in sex or care work – will be to attempt to persuade each other, to debate, as Zerilli (2005, 2009) suggests.

Our understanding of democratic politics is that it is, and should be, multiple and therefore, inescapably contentious (or agonistic, to use the language of Mouffe, 2005, 2013). Feminism then can be thought of as a set of political projects, not a unified movement, in which change, negotiation and compromise is always already present given complexly contingent relations among other macro-structures such as “race,” empire, capitalism, and religion. What appears as a perverse politics then can be more helpfully understood as challenge and resistance, or claiming and response, not in the usual sense of women, or other subjugated people, resisting dominant understandings, but in terms of conflicts among (gendered, feminist) political actors. This need not always be a deliberate, purposeful challenge. When those people who are considered “subjects of feminism” (or subjects of any other kinds of politics) do not act in expected ways, they may normatively question feminist or other forms of politics. In that sense, deliberate or not, they expose the perverse construction of that what we call “the political.”

Perhaps the perversity of the political starts the moment any movement prescribes universal models of, and solutions to, what it has defined as

problems. One current example of perverse politics is the recent feminist initiative around “trafficking,” where it is common to find a vision of women as always coerced, victimized, in need of protection, men as always predators, and expanding the carceral institutions of the state as an appropriate solution to the problem (see Elizabeth Bernstein’s and Kimberly Kay Hoang’s papers in this volume; also [Hua, 2011](#)). In order to counter this simplifying move, we need to develop analyses that are truly multiple. The first analytical move toward a more multiple politics thus is to call for grounded analyses that will help us define (feminist) problems based on embodied experiences of the social world, rather than departing from a universal understanding of oppression, according to which sex segregation, sex work, or veiling, by definition is oppressive, regardless of how the subjects who engage in these practices experience them.⁶ To be clear, this is not to argue for anything-goes relativism, but to suggest that like everything else, “the political” also has a context.

The second analytical move is to emphasize that this is about politics. Identities do not immediately prescribe or entail politics. These reflections bring us into conversations with a number of feminist political theorists. Wendy Brown encouraged feminists to discard the language of “I am” in favor of the language “I want this for us” as a means to destabilize the formulation of identity as a fixed position and as having moral entailments. “Rather than opposing or seeking to transcend identity investments, the replacement of the language of “being” with “wanting” would seek to exploit politically a recovery of the more expansive moments in the genealogy of identity formation, a recovery of the moment prior to its own foreclosure (1995, p.75)” she suggests. [Zerilli \(2005\)](#) argues that politics inherently consists of making exclusionary claims, for total inclusion is impossible, yet in democratic contexts, claims are always subject to contestation.

UNEXPECTED/UNEASY ALLIANCES

Our insistence on keeping the focus on politics leads us to our final instance of perversity. The complexity of claims, interests and identities has led to feminist alliances that can be seen as perverse. Politics entails alliances and enmities; politics is about constituting “us” and “them.” Yet “we” can also enter into alliances with (some of) “them” when it furthers our purposes. As a minority among a majority often oppressed and excluded, some feminists have relied on alliances with more powerful actors in order to make

advances. We might think such alliances useful when they resulted in advances, such as male legislators enacting women's suffrage. Yet some feminists also entered alliances with conservatives in the Temperance movement, supporting Prohibition (the 18th Amendment), and more recently, have worked with social conservatives to fight against pornography. These alliances have often led to the expansion of state powers rather than to the expansion of civil liberties, while alienating other feminists (e.g., in the infamous "sex wars" of the 1980s).

Historically, in the United States, there have been trade-offs and difficult decisions about political strategy and tactics between African Americans and women in the struggles for suffrage and for civil rights. And the politics of reproduction and sexuality were deeply entangled with racial divides as well. Take the case of early twentieth-century birth control movements, which might be thought to promote a straightforward "feminist interest" in women's control of their bodies. As the early "voluntary motherhood" movement resulted in mostly white upper-class women choosing to focus on careers and reduce the number of children they were having, President Theodore Roosevelt declared that "race purity" must be maintained, and equated the falling birth-rate among native-born whites with "race suicide." This eugenicist logic soon became influential in the birth control movement. Margaret Sanger, a key figure in promoting contraception and feminism, turned her attention from birth control to population control, stating that "the chief issue of birth control ... [is] more children from the fit and less from the unfit" (Davis, 1981; see also Gordon, 2002). Davis (1981) discusses Sanger in the course of explaining the reluctance of many women of color to join the birth control and abortion rights movements. She then invites us, feminists, to center on the needs of the most disadvantaged women as the most promising way to build a broad and diverse coalition in favor of reproductive rights – rather than a perverse alliance with eugenicists whose interest in women was in the cause of promoting "white racial purity."

Not only in the United States, but uneasy alliances between feminists and foreign policy elites have a long history across the global North, beginning in the era of imperialism, when many feminists were historically complicit with colonial state elites in ways that enabled them to have a certain freedom that too often came at the expense of colonized women (Burton, 1998). The scathing critique of Indian men's treatment of Indian women in *Mother India* (2000 [1927]) by American journalist Katherine Mayo is but one of the one of the most egregious examples, used as it was to delegitimize India's demands to be free from British rule. In the contemporary

period, we note that George Bush and Tony Blair instrumentally justified military campaigns in the Islamic world with the argument that they wanted to promote gender equality and the freedom of Muslim women.⁷ Laura Bush has been feted for her work on behalf of Afghan women after the United States invaded Afghanistan, while the Feminist Majority, a major US-based feminist organization, urged President Obama not to withdraw from Afghanistan before women are rescued from the Taliban's repression (Abu-Lughod, 2002). There is reason to be concerned that only certain elements of feminism are being absorbed by the states of the global north, NGOs, and international organizations – those that dovetail with their economic or military-political goals. Similarly, it is troubling when some feminist NGOs and elites instrumentally utilize the unquestionably serious needs of women in the global South to promote their own organizational agendas and career advancement.

We do not want to suggest that all alliances with domestic or international political elites are ill-fated and damaging to feminist causes. National liberation struggles have notably featured alliances among diverse groups. A number of scholars have pointed to the unanticipated consequences of elite attempts to co-opt local feminists and other activists, when these actors push beyond the official terms of engagement (e.g., Otto, 2010 on the UN Security Council's resolutions concerning women, peace, and security). Solidarity movements between feminists of the Global North and South, and within the Global South, have been of vital importance. Yet because feminists are located in nations and states, and nations and states have unequal power in the world system, attempts at international alliances that ignore history often result in perverse politics. The authors of the papers in this volume do not assume that the simple presence of self-proclaimed feminists in any alliance offers a guarantee about the character of the political causes advanced.

THE PAPERS

The papers in this special issue address these three areas of “perversity” of politics. While the complex stories each author presents here cannot be easily separated and made to represent solely one of these categories, we see each of them as more prominently exemplifying one of these areas than the others. Hoang and Bernstein's papers respond to the issue of “false consciousness” and put pressure on discourses around sex trafficking that

position women in sex work as always already trafficked – naïve, victimized, and taken advantage of – as well as the logic that positions the “war” against sex trafficking as a (corporate) moral good. Hoang discusses what she calls the *perverse humanitarianism* of anti-trafficking activists who make alliances with states and police to reclassify sex-workers as trafficked women, thereby ignoring both the conditions under which sex-work would be preferable to factory and other work, and the agency of those who chose this work over even less desirable work. Thus her paper addresses the problem of assumed false consciousness – “no one would choose sex work” – as well as that of uneasy alliances.

The papers by Bernstein, Jennifer Carlson, and Orloff and Shiff explore some of the troubling implications of the alliances of anti-trafficking activists, pro-gun women, and feminists, respectively, with more powerful groups. While Hoang focuses on actions of anti-trafficking NGOs in Vietnam, Bernstein’s paper examines the NGO/conservative church/hi-tech corporate nexus that puts anti-trafficking front and center of their concern. Bernstein investigates the ways corporate elites advertise their involvement in campaigns against trafficking to burnish their corporate brands, while anti-trafficking advocates gain access to resources in the transaction. Through a mapping of the involvement of companies such as Google and others in the anti-trafficking movement and the promise of technology-led redemption from trafficking, Bernstein argues that there is a moralization rather than a politicization of the issue of sex trafficking. The question of false consciousness (in other terms) permeates the assumption that Northern NGOs, churches, and the corporate sector hold about trafficking, and the alliances of groups working together has neatly slotted anti-trafficking into defense of free labor.

Carlson explores the ways pro-gun women have taken up the promise of “equal rights” and individuals’ rights to self-defense to embrace gun ownership as emancipatory – here, identifying a “perverse” orientation from the perspective of pacifist feminists. As such women got involved in gun rights activities and politics, they developed an uneasy alliance with pro-gun men. Intriguingly, these Second-Amendment activists, who initially saw themselves as the only legitimate protectors of women, came to support armed women who could protect themselves and their families. Orloff and Shiff review an emerging critique of “feminists in power,” in a political context that has undoubtedly changed from the days when women were simply excluded from positions of power. This critique claims that some feminists advance policies which regulate sexual and labor practices as part of a practice of “governance feminism,” and that some feminist ideas – women’s

employment (as simple commodification) above all – have been appropriated by political elites inspired by neoliberal agendas. They argue that this critique raises important issues for contemporary feminist politics – first, that the rise of second-wave feminism coincided with the rise of new forms of socially conservative and neoliberal intellectual and political projects and that part of their successes has resulted from the appropriation and reshaping of ideas and values originally forwarded by feminists. And second that the installation of feminist ideas within state elite institutions works to reshape and redefine these (feminist) ideas themselves. But they reject overly generalized critiques of feminists’ appropriation, and call for contextualized empirical investigations into specific instances of feminism’s reciprocal, though still unequal, relationship with political and social power in all its guises, in which there is the potential for both adaptation and appropriation.

Savina Balasubramanian and Savcı’s papers speak to “multiplicity rather than perversity.” Balasubramanian tells the story of activism around decriminalization of India’s national sodomy law (Section 377) and its subsequent reinstatement by the Indian Supreme Court. Paying particular attention to Indian activists’ debates around the meanings of public and private, and how different constituents had differing access to them, Balasubramanian demonstrates that privacy does not simply signify “freedom” in the Indian queer activist and feminist circles. Echoing queer studies scholarship that has demonstrated the limits of rights-based claims that are predicated upon (and perpetuate) the private/public binary, Balasubramanian adds to these discussions by showing how these criticisms of activist practices, usually produced in the academy in the global North, in fact organically emerge from the diverse lived experiences of queer activists circles in India. Underlining the Western liberal notions that underwrite the public/private divide, as well as the notion of “the closet” that follows from it, Balasubramanian does not refuse the utility or the meaning of the closet to some queers, but seeks to “provincialize” the closet instead of treating those who refuse its universal appeal as “perverse.”

Savcı traces the “incitement to discourse” of Muslim headscarf activists about the issue of homosexuality in Turkey. Discussing the process through which support for homosexual rights came to represent a litmus test for the political sincerity of Muslim women headscarf activists, she shows how a subject that hesitates to utter “I support homosexual rights” yet who also opposes cruelty against homosexuals is rendered unintelligible. At the same time, by analyzing the multiple positions different Muslim headscarf activists took on this issue, she shows that a homogenous understanding of

a “Muslim” position on homosexuality is untenable. She argues that this latter is especially important in the context of the current Turkish government, who increasingly has monopolized what Islam stands for and who counts as a proper Muslim, and suggests that it is possible to recognize difference without needing to position it as radical alterity.

The papers collected here stimulate us to rethink the future of feminist politics, and to confront some of the feminist attachments that might stand in the way of developing a more satisfying understanding of women’s diverse political engagements. Rather than assuming that “other women” must be wrong, backwards, victims of false consciousness – perverse – we might, by embracing notions of multiplicity and contestation, find better ways to have conversations and imagine solidarities among feminists in different places and with different politics.

NOTES

1. We note the multiple differences between, on the one hand, the many tendencies among feminists of the 1960s and 1970s, and, on the other, the feminism that got constructed as canonical and symbolic of the whole movement (e.g., [Thompson, 2002](#)). We do not endorse narratives that claim “third-wave” versions of feminism have improved upon hopelessly “white, middle-class, heterosexist” second-wave feminism, which some have understood as a kind of generational split or even academic matricide, or, as [Fraser \(2009, 2013\)](#) would have it – a reversal of the charges of matricide – recent feminism’s betrayal of a vigorously anti-capitalist feminism more prevalent during the second wave. Instead, we are trying to reinvigorate and recast anti-imperialist feminisms, which have existed alongside other variants, across all three (or however many) waves. See also the work of [Hemmings \(2011\)](#) on “why stories matter,” a critique of various modes of retelling the history of theoretical development in feminism.

2. Ann Shola Orloff and Talia Shiff (this volume) address Halley’s critique in the course of assessing feminist critiques of “feminism/s in power.”

3. [Eagleton \(1991\)](#) points out that Marx himself never used the term “false consciousness.” Further, cultural Marxists such as [Sahlins \(1976\)](#) assert that the nature of “interests” is entirely dependent upon the symbolic structures that are in place. Therefore, practical action is always informed by cultural conceptions.

4. The entire field of subaltern studies emerged as a challenge to Marx’s argument that peasants could never reach a political class consciousness in ways urban wage-workers would.

5. One other response to simplistic understanding of interests has come from scholarship that complicates the rather affectless understanding of subjectivity that follows from them, by emphasizing the unruly, the irrational, and the counter-intuitive. People simply do not act according to whatever might seem to be their (material) “interest,” human action is not always “rational” and purposeful, and

subjects have multiple values and interests that can be contradictory to each other (Adams, 1999, 2005; Berlant, 2011; Hays, 1996). While this scholarship usually sets its target as rational choice/actor theory, which is a radically different strain of thought from Marxism, a modernist understanding of reason and rationality also underwrites the Marxist subject. It is in this sense we find this scholarship worthy of mentioning here which makes visible the modernist assumptions that underlie any theoretical frameworks that predicate upon the notion of “interest.”

6. Too often, the immediate assumption is that these practices must have been imposed by male relatives. This assumption has been problematized by activists, for example, in the context of banning the veil in France (Scott, 2007), and is also taken up in Evren Savcı’s paper.

7. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, there may be feminist support for some campaigns on the part of global North states in the name of furthering gender equality, which does not necessarily translate into support for adventures to find and eradicate weapons of mass destruction (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 2002 and the debate between Adams & Orloff, 2005 and Young, 2005).

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