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Gender and Europe

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

**What is Gender? Where is Europe?
Walking with Balibar**

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The Fifth Ursula Hirschmann Annual Lecture on Gender and Europe

What is Gender? Where is Europe? Walking with Balibar

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European University Institute, Florence
21 April 2005

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LECTURE

by

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What is Gender? Where is Europe? Walking with Balibar

There is a sharp distinction between the history of mainstream gender-consciousness in the various states of North western Europe and the use of gender in what Etienne Balibar has called 'colonial bad conscience.'¹ To begin with I will make the obvious point, then: what 'Europe' is to Elisabeth Badinter, as she writes, from France: 'the difference between the sexes is a fact, but it does not predestine us to roles and functions;' or to Anna Bravo, in Italy, as she relates reproductive rights to terrorism, is not what 'Europe' is to an undocumented immigrant woman who is part of, or companion to, an unacknowledgeable labor export.² And, if we step outside of such considerations, to us outsiders the idea of Europe seems better consolidated over against the United States in geopolitics and competitively in global economics. the day before I left New York, I read an interesting news item in *The New York Times*:

Massimo Capuano, the president of the Borsa Italiana, Italy's stock exchange, brought representatives of Italian companies to New York last week to drum up interest. He said trading in Italian stocks by investors outside Italy, whether in Europe or in the United States, was still hampered by differences in settlement and other post-trading issues. Even if these differences are resolved, he is not betting that

1 Etienne Balibar 2004. 'Dissonances Within Laïcité', *Constellations*, 11(3), p. 360.

2 Elisabeth Badinter 2003. *Fausse route*. Paris: Odile Jacob, p. 217; Anna Bravo 2005. 'Noi donne e i silenzi sull' aborto', interviewed by Simonetta Fiori, *La Repubblica*, 2 February, published online.

the groundwork will be in place for a complete consolidation of European markets. 'Today, there are definitely too many markets,' he said. 'But will there be one European stock exchange?' he asked. 'I don't think so. You need competition between two or more players. This is the case in the U.S., where you have more than one exchange.' One possibility is having two exchanges that trade both large- and small-capitalization stocks but differ somewhat in the type of companies they trade, the way the New York Stock Exchange and the Nasdaq market do in the United States. But he said he was sure of one thing he wants: that the Borsa Italiana control its home market, [Italy].³

In November 2005, the Europe editor of *La Stampa* told a Chinese reporter on Chinese television as China advances economic agreements with Europe: there is no Europe! The conversation was aggressively looped on CCTV 9.

How representative is this? You will ask. It is, in so far as the idea of a unified modern 'Europe' is too 'globalized.' Globalization sanctions generalization. In your heart's core you are Italian, you are English, American; in different ways. 'Europe' will still seem a public concept. What does that have to do with gender? Who can move women in the name of 'Europe' today? The kind of statelessness that had moved Ursula Hirschmann to claim 'Europe' in the private core and sanctuary of her heart and thus to move out toward its public space, its public realization, has changed in the history of the last sixty years. That particular undoing of the public-private divide is now in the dominant.⁴ The denial of Europe to Jewish Europeans, to the Ashkenazim, who had a strong European heritage was a shaming story internal to Europe. The tradition of European feminism—as opposed to general European politics—did not make a distinction then between Jewish and Gentile feminisms.⁵ It is another narrative now. The sense of being without a country is overcharged with an ontological excess of country in the enclaves where gender festers in today's 'Europe.' If, one might even say, you will not let me belong to your country you must build a simulacrum of the place where you and I both think I might belong, although, when I am there, I am 'European' now—that complex narrative might run.

The strict distinction between public and private has always ever held only in theory. It is not that the public and the private are hopelessly entangled. They can be separated in thought. It is just that the public and the private bleed into each other at all times and, if you apparently solve the problem by sticking to legal definitions alone—when you are thinking and acting as a citizen rather than as a member of the state machinery or the administrative machinery of the European Union, of the legislative machinery of state or Union, as a member of the judiciary of either, or yet as a law professor or student inclined

3 Jonathan Fuerbringer 2005. 'Thunder? Or Is It Inflation?', *New York Times*, 17 April, accessed at www.nytimes.com.

4 Derrida has an interesting analysis of the trajectory of the Ashkenazim in 'Interpretations At War: Kant, the Jew, the German', in: Gil Anidjar (ed.) 2002, *Acts of Religion*. [tr. Gil Anidjar], New York: Routledge, pp. 137-188.

5 It was precisely to theorize a change from finding a home for refugees from Nazism to giving asylum to global refugees today that I delivered a lecture to the Stiftung-Dialogik in Switzerland that resulted in my book *Imperatives to Re-Imagine the Planet/Imperative zur Neuerfindung des Planeten*, ed. Willi Goetschel, 1999. Vienna: Passagen. Among leading feminists who were Jewish one might count Emma Goldman, American with a European cast, and, Rosa Luxemburg, not by any means a single-issue feminist.

to rational choice alone, you will be solving the problem of the internal contamination of the public and the private by the letter of the law alone and, in spite of the apparent solution, the problem will exacerbate. It will fester, get worse and worse. We certainly need strict definitions in order to legislate, although not necessarily in order to enforce or dispense the law. Philosophers of different traditions have known for a long time that to be able to state the problem may mean more than apparently to solve it, except in mathematics, or in philosophy done on a mathematical model. The attempt to understand the complexity of a problem in order to be able to state it, according to our capacities and the circumstances of our lives, is the obligation of the citizen, most especially of those who crave citizenship in a foreign state and are denied the privilege.

Why do I bring up our obligation to study the intermingling of the public and the private when our topic is gender in Europe? It is because, in what we loosely call 'Europe' today, one strong and particular feature is the use of gender upon the conflictual terrain of citizenship claims in a strange land, because the claimant wants to share in the pride of the abstract public noun 'Europe,' with a mysterious and shining history. And yet, that pride is also a private affect, a kind of dirty secret, a pride clashing (or not) with the place left behind, changing in either direction as the generations pass. Yet again, because we cannot acknowledge it, mere racism (combined with ethnic sexism) can bring us down, even as, its literary, mediatic and/or theoretical stagings can bring acclaim and reward. The permission to publish, stage, or theorize is class-marked, sometimes marked by its own struggles. How does art inhabit the public/private distinction? Is such a question relevant to theorization? How do art and philosophy relate to the public sphere? Where, indeed, is Europe, the public sphere that is most dearly sought here?

In order to ask these questions, we must be able to imagine that gender in 'Europe,' and gender in those other places, are complicit, folded together. For formally and structurally, the thought of gender is the first abstraction, and any group that has thought through the social system in terms of the sexual division of labor has thought the *socius* in the abstract.

This sex-gender system is not only not a particular system, it may be the abbreviated name of system as such, where system is uneasily sutured onto the non-, para-, or extra-systemic. In order to ask the question of the sex-gender system, we must ask: why is there difference? Sex > gender—whatever you call it—is our first access to semiosis, our first meaning-making instrument. It provides us with the structure—thing-word-meaning—that Saussure was not alone in setting up as what in English is called referent-signifier-signified.⁶ When 'religion' begins to freeze a sex-gender system in the rift of a failed class-formation that would 'free' gender as we know it, it is irrelevant if the sex-thing is a fact-thing or a fiction-thing. As long as one is focused on allowing post-feudal class-formation to happen, so that the fact-fiction battle can emerge as an opposition, the persons involved in the struggle will probably think the sex-thing is a fact, but not grounds for an oppressive gender system. Although openness toward sexual preference or transsexuality can be taken on board here, it must be admitted that gender-freedom won this way is mired in problems. Taking the entire thing-word-meaning triad as a performance-thing or even a performative will not be of much help at this stage. I cannot

6 Ferdinand de Saussure 1983. *Course in General Linguistics*. [tr. Roy Harris], London: Duckworth, pp. 111-122.

be interested in which is the correct view, for, as I have already indicated, I believe this question hits its head against ‘Why is there difference?’, where even ‘difference is’ is as forbidding a paradox as ‘I am lying.’ Indeed, in this regard, single-issue performativist anti-essentialist insistence easily undoes the fragility of the paradox as question: How is difference?

Gender can be the name of the tendency toward the spectral which produces the effect of the empirical, whose name can be sex. Indeed, it is the empirical that makes explicit the mysteriousness of being-human, for it claims the field of production, makes difference felt as identity, necessity as freedom, keeping spectrality under control. Today ‘sex’ names the part of the empirical well—it is a noun rich in variations of meaning. Ordinary language gives it an unconventional dimension of the performative, to have it is to do it. My point has been that the idea of a sex-gender system does not obliterate this peculiar rhythm.

If we want to learn the lesson of what we call gender, we will say that the spectralization of labor in capitalism is held within the semiotic spectralization of gender that is as old as the human or, in some way, the animal. Therefore, all gender-enterprise—and I mean this word ‘enterprise’ in every way—must tend toward a multiple-issue state of being. Marx’s texts almost invariably mark a discontinuity between the relationship between freedom and necessity in philosophy, in history, and in the preparation for history that is revolutionary action. But international communism did not always remember it.

Today we must work at that discontinuity, and I give here a rudimentary idea of that work. It is the discontinuity between, on the one hand, the philosophical spectralization of labor in capitalism being held within the semiotic generalization of gender; and, on the other, the rift that has arisen between Western Marxism and gender freed by capital which finds the revolution in gender planning held within the spectralization of capital. This work of undoing is always around the corner and is deeply cognizant of regional and national political economy and its relationship with capital as such, incorrectly described as inter-national capital. Here is Gayle Rubin, who coined the phrase ‘sex-gender system,’ de-anthropologized.⁷ Because ‘Europe,’ its ‘essence identified with its western destiny,’ turned this Marxist project into social democracy via the Second International, the European constitution can lay claim, in the constitutional rhetoric of guaranteeing what must be achieved—a dubious gender equality.⁸ It is in such a frame that I had once proposed education as a social movement. But that narrative has also changed. It is the state that must learn the relationship between gender and uniformity, gender and the uniform. Social movement—extra-state collective action that held the state accountable—has now given way to the international civil society where the state is made irrelevant. Here a distinction between ‘Europe’ and its others can be felt. I will touch upon curriculum in closing.

7 Gayle Rubin 1975. ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex’, in: Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward An Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 157-210.

8 Etienne Balibar (2005) has an important discussion of if Europe can be constituted in *Europe, constitution, frontière*. Bègles: Passant, p. 62f. The embedded phrase is from p. 26 of the book.

But, you will say, 'gender' is a European word! Indeed. Rather than focus on the word 'gender' as used by the transnational agencies and the feminist dominant, we should ask if the thing described by the phrase 'sex-gender system' has vanished from the face of the earth. Let us describe this phenomenon in the myriad languages of the world. There is no need to produce a translation of the word 'gender'. This is not a matter of bickering over linguistic hegemony. We allow power to serve us rather than control us by acknowledging the convenience of English when necessary. This will immediately make clear what we know, that the use of the word 'gender' need not be marked by cultural difference; for it is marked by class-mobility. (This idea of complicity between gender and class runs through my entire essay.) Sex-gender systems exist all over. To call them by that name is a privilege of the few. The solution is not to throw the words away but for the ones who supposedly use the words for the world's good to learn how to let go of the word as an origin which can only produce more or less faithful translations as the languages move further and further away from English. Let us rather learn to learn from the resistance to such analyses. That is the long haul, a process of re-learning human equality that goes beyond the word 'gender,' if anything can do so. The field of decision loses its horizon here. For the question is no longer who decides, but who dictates what the choices should be, out of what axiomatics?

It is because 'Europe' cannot learn this that it decides that its 'gendering' is separate from 'their' gendering. Gender is negotiating not only class but also race here. When the European Constitution—rather far from the idea of a federation of Europe—advertises itself as good for women, the one question that it is obliged to avoid is 'Where is Europe?' For the constitution, Europe is a given, already-existing origin, a place already there to come to: 'Conscious that Europe is a continent that has brought forth civilisation; that its inhabitants, arriving in successive waves from earliest times, have gradually developed the values underlying humanism...'

When Nicole Ameline, the French Minister of Parity and Professional Equality, speaks of the European Constitution, she aligns herself (as does the Constitution itself) with the United Nations, and its Millennium Development goals.⁹ In all of this there is such a sense of superiority, of 'bringing civilization,' as the very first sentence of the constitution claims, that it is very difficult to take its simultaneous claim for equality seriously. In 1948 W. E. B DuBois had been dropped from the U.S. delegation to the United Nations because he had 'reject[ed] an outline for world government in which "at least one-fourth of the inhabitants of the world have no part [...], no democratic rights."' ¹⁰ If Europe (or the United States) takes upon itself the role of the transformer of globalization by declaring itself a space of difference, we have not come very far, although the economic subtext of 'development' may carry with it a greater destructive potential than a clearly visible evil against which wars of national liberation could be fought.

All of this has rather little to do with gender as I have described it above. What is taken for gender-sensitivity is, then, no more than a phrase about equality between women and men. Any feminist who has worked for legal and civil rights for women

9 Speech pronounced in Dijon, on 11 April 2005 (from the web).

10 David Levering Lewis 2000. *W.E.B. DuBois: the Fight For Equality and the American Century: 1919 - 1963*. New York: Henry Holt, pp. 502-534. The quoted passage is from p. 504.

knows that this phrasing is not to be mocked. It can, however, be said that that abstract uniformity keeps the spectrality of gender untouched. The spectral is unreal (to that extent not-quite-not-abstract) yet embodied, unanticipatable in the periodicity of its intervention. Gender work, abstracting from sexual difference and establishing social practice can undermine the promise and even the performance of legal and civil equality. Here again, the public and the private play in unacknowledgable ways.

Talking about the constitution, Etienne Balibar says it is not a space of identity but a space of frontiers and differences:

Europe is not an end in itself, but should be recognized as an instrument of transformation of the course of globalization ... I borrow the expression (political space) from the recent book of Carlo Galli. [...] his conclusion leads to the 'necessity of Europe' (*L'Europa necessaria* ('necessary Europe,' surely, with a subtle difference in nuance)) from which I quote a few passages: '[...] we must find an alternative even if provisional to the dream of democratic cosmopolitanism: the present conditions of time and space suggest that we should seek out an European alternative, making of the European space a land of differences.'¹¹

The passage comes from an essay entitled 'Europe, Land of Frontiers.' It is undoubtedly a good idea to revise the first sentence of the European Constitution, which assumes an originary Europe, to a place of differences, owing such a pattern to nationalism and imperialism, soldered by a citizenship that fosters European-ness. But why propose it as a good thing for globalization? The United States has a variant of this tendency as well—offering multiculturalism as a panacea for globalization. The answer to 'Where is Europe?' (as indeed to 'Where is America?') is not '(off)-center of the globe.' I want to ask my dear friend Etienne Balibar if he can walk with me here if I say this is where colonial bad conscience becomes good conscience: Europe's domestic policy becomes an allegory of the global: the famous last words of Jürgen Habermas's pronouncement in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*:

Each of the large European nations has reached the peak of the unfolding of imperial power, and—more importantly for our context—each has also have had to work through the experience of the loss of an empire. This experience of decline was combined in many cases with the loss of colonies. With the increasing distance from imperial power and colonial history, the European powers have had the chance to take up a reflective distance from themselves. Thus they could learn to perceive themselves, through the eyes of the conquered, in the doubtful role of conquerors who are being called to account for the violence of a forced and deracinating modernization. That might have promoted a turning away from eurocentrism, and inspired a kantian hope for a world domestic policy.¹²

(The document is co-signed by Derrida. Derrida has so definitively distanced himself from Kantian politics in *Rogues*, published subsequently, that we must either presume a change of mind, or, what is more likely, take the joint statement as a gesture of peace.)¹³

11 Ibid., pp. 11, 96-97.

12 Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, 'After the War: the Rebirth of Europe', excerpts published online 31 May 2003, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; translation mine.

13 Jacques Derrida 2005. 'Teleology and Architectonic', *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. [tr. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas], Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, pp. 118-140.

Difference and multiculturalism are good things, but European post-imperial post-coloniality does not solve globalization! Indeed, that obsession with solving globalization is precisely the hardy perennial of a good imperialism kicking back in. European domestic policy is not global foreign policy. Perhaps 'Europe,' wherever it is, should consider another frontier that it has been millennially at pains to deny. Unlike Africa, Australia, and the Americas, Europe is the tiny western edge of Eurasia.¹⁴ (Derrida had considered the edginess of Europe in *The Other Heading*, but his glance was on the two Mediterranean shores, not on the scandal of Eurasia.)¹⁵

And Eurasia is indeed a land of differences, surely a greater antidote to globalization because mostly at the receiving, rather than at the giving end. In a conversation with Matthias Gefrath, Balibar reminds us that 'Marxism is first and foremost the idea of the class struggle.'¹⁶ Let us call the frontier inside Eurasia as marking an allegory of class struggle, among classed nations, as it were, and let us think that a critical regionalism of these terrains of difference, (perhaps going toward Africa and the Fourth World in Latin America and the Greater Caribbean, the African continent, Australia) might be a better ground for cultivating restraints toward the uniformity of globalization: the Caucasus, India, the immense Chinese diaspora, international rather than immigrant Islam write the Eurasian terrain of difference that 'Europe' cannot overlook. We float next to the immense heterogeneity of Oceania and the Pacific, the hunting ground of indigenous knowledge and preemptive patenting for the globalizers. That Europeans would be uneasy to think this unrestricted space of difference does not change my argument, especially since some of these places—China, India, Brazil—are beginning to play a rising role in globalization. The heritage of imperialism is not the only way to become a space of difference, and it has no particular connection to globalization. Once you step out on this terrain, the mechanics of gender itself is seen as a space of immense difference, all of which have to be lumped together as the 'other' of Europe if gender as equality between men and women is dictated by Europe.

If I find Balibar's confidence in Europe as a transformative idea for globalization somewhat troubling, I find his treatment of the specific problem of the *hijab* crisis altogether exemplary. I am pleased that he has cited my essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', pronounced more than twenty years ago, in his piece 'Dissonances within Laïcité', a piece that deals with that particular debate in France.¹⁷ Indeed, in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' I had realized that, although the British had criminalized Hindu law regarding the exceptional burning of widows, neither Hindu patriarchy nor British patriarchy had engaged the subjectivity of the women and so the change did not have the intended impact. Thus, I started on a journey to build infrastructure so that women's own

14 I understand why Balibar must say 'Perhaps we should come to recognize that Russia is also Europe,' but in fact the Russian Federation is Eurasia. It is interesting that the alternative to thinking Russia European is, for Balibar, 'to see in the Russians essentially a nation of barbarians', in *Europe*, p. 47.

15 Jacques Derrida 1992. *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. [tr. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas], Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

16 Balibar, *Europe*, p.30.

17 Balibar, 'Dissonances within Laïcité', p.366, n.17. 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' can be found in a revised version in Spivak 1999. *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards A History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 244-311.

resistance against such practices as widow-burning could be recognized as such. I could see this line of work, with the gendered subaltern, in the formerly colonized countries, as I still can. When, however, in the nineties, I wrote about diasporics, I made an exception for the underclass gendered diasporic, absolving or excusing her from the responsibilities assigned to her younger, more educated daughters and granddaughters.¹⁸ I can do so no longer. The situation has changed. The political use of gender is stronger in the lower reaches of diasporic class-stratification. At this point, the task of cultural persuasion, of the uncoercive rearrangement of unexamined culturalism, is the immediate task of the diasporic upper class, like many of you here. This task intervenes in the disposition of that private ‘pride’ in Europe, and the public fear and disappointment sheltering in a nostalgia that supports the political use of gender, on right and left. ‘Europe’ is a wavering site, a name to conjure with; otherwise only the abstract structures of law, capital, administration. Where, indeed, is Europe? Where an Elisabeth Badinter sums up French feminism, or a Bravo or the Diotima group speaks of the European women’s movement, the diasporics disappear. Europe for them is a confident shadow, behind national identities.

Yet the diasporics generalize as well. Here is Nacira Guénif-Souilamas and Éric Macé (a neutral name, more ‘European’): ‘the most troubling thing in this affair was the extraordinary ‘profeminist’ consensus’—Badinter is irrelevant here—encountered by these two initiatives, from left to right and up to the very highest levels of the state. In other words, so that in France feminism is not ‘tacky,’ and can merit a benevolent political and mediatic attention, it is necessary for it to constitute adversaries beyond discussion: the embittered radical lesbian and the Arab boy.¹⁹

Here feminism, as described by the authors, has no concern with gender, whatever its self-representation. It is anecdotal, situational, counting on denying sexual difference as it works at it. It is a coding of the austere spectrality of gender as such, which we catch only in injunctions.

To track the play of coding, I want to quote something I’ve written elsewhere, for the argument does not change:

Agency calls for the putting aside of difference. Agency presumes collectivity, which is where a group acts by synecdoche: the part that seems to agree is taken to stand for the whole. I put aside the surplus of my subjectivity and metonymize myself, count myself as the part by which I am connected to the particular predicament so that I can claim collectivity, and engage in action validated by that very collective. A performative contradiction connects the metonymy and the synecdoche into agential identity.²⁰ All calls to collectivity are metonymic because attached to a situation. And they work by synecdoche. In order to be able to restrict singularity by agential intuition, an immense labor of infrastructural change, to make resistance count (geltend), to make it recognizable, must be undertaken. When the potential agent is not publicly empowered to put aside difference and self-

18 Spivak 1996. ‘Diasporas Old and New: Women in a Transnational World’, *Textual Practices* 10(2), pp. 245-269.

19 Nacira Guénif-Souilamas and Éric Macé 2004. *Les féministes et le garçon arabe*. Paris:Seuil, p. 10; translation mine.

20 The classic analysis is in Derrida 1986. ‘Declarations of Independence’, [tr. Thomas W. Keenan and T. Pepper], *New Political Science* 15 (Summer), pp. 3-19.

synecdochize to form collectivity, the group will take difference itself as its synecdochic element. Difference will slide into ‘culture,’ often indistinguishable from ‘religion.’ And then the institution that provides agency is reproductive heteronormativity (RHN). It is the broadest and oldest global institution. You see now why just writing about women does not solve the problem of the gendered subaltern In general, the leaders of collectivities—‘good’ or ‘bad’—have the right to the metonym/synecdoche complex. That the rank and file do not, sometimes gets overlooked. That I believe is the difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ movements. The effort is to build infrastructure so that the underclass can, when necessary, when the public sphere calls for it, synecdochize themselves without identitarian exploitation (sometimes well-meaning but equally destructive), from above. The solution, as I see it, is not to celebrate or deny difference, but find out what specific case of inequality brings about the use of difference and who can deny it on occasion. The solution is also not to create ‘a politics of recognition’ where this problematic is altogether ignored.²¹ The solution cannot come to us from the international civil society, self-selected moral entrepreneurs who distribute philanthropy without democracy.²² I believe the existing debates about contingency and universality have not taken this into account.²³

In my final movement I will, as I always do, give some suggestions for work. I will go back for a moment to the abstract word gender, because I have asked the onto-phenomenological question in my title: What is gender? I gave a provisional answer above, in the way that we learned to ask it in the last century. What is called ‘gender,’ and then added, , in other tongues?

‘I am struck (and sometimes with despair) by the gap between the communitarian projects to which the whole world subscribes in principle, and the weakness of communication, of exchange, of polemic, between the citizens of different European countries,’ Balibar writes.²⁴

In an earlier dispensation, Switzerland claimed multiculturalism because it has, since 1848, recognized its French, Italian, and German elements. Today its so-called multiculturalist policy is altogether more complex because it is obliged to take allocthonous Europeans into account. In the same way, Balibar’s idea of communication recognizes

21 Charles C. Taylor 1992. ‘The Politics of Recognition’, in: Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

22 Alas the United Nations noble Millennium Project suffers from this. I do not mean to denigrate its awesome scope and the good intentions of its framers.

23 There is a good discussion of the debate in James Penney 2002. ‘(Queer) Theory and the Universal Alternative’, *Diacritics* 32(2) (Summer), pp. 3–41. I cannot lay claim to Penney’s theoretical sophistication. But I offer my approach as an open-ended response to Penney’s important question: ‘if we acknowledge that Left-leaning cultural criticism has in the last decade or so reached a virtual consensus that the Foucault-style postmodern emphasis on difference, specificity, and particularity necessarily features either (a) a socioeconomic short circuit misrecognizing the fact that, by virtue of the lack of closure of the general social field (the barred Other for Lacanians, the structural necessity of sutute/articulation for the “radical democrats”), any expression of a “particular” political interest always manifests either an implicit “call” to the universal or a formally necessary “gesture” of universalization, how is the very concept of the universal to be elaborated?’ (p. 9). My self-quotation is from ‘Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular’, forthcoming in *Postcolonial Theory*.

24 Balibar, *Europe*, p. 17.

only the borders of European states as generally established in the nineteenth century. Let us expand this to the internal differences within each state. Then the idea of communication will have to be based on depth-learning of languages. If the United Nations are celebrated by the supporters of the European Constitution, at the other extreme from Balibar, they too might look at the UN's Permanent Bureau for endangered languages and extend the mandate to languages endangered by national policy toward immigrants. Thus, the suggestion to acknowledge intra-state differences embraces the entire political spectrum from left to right. This is an inconvenient suggestion, but, if you thought you could win our praises by an easy politics of discussing away the use of reproductive heteronormativity to displace class oppression, you are wrong.

The mechanics of the uses of gender are deeply embedded in language as the vehicle of managing the mind's random place in the real.²⁵ Europe is nowhere, or, alas, everywhere it wants to be if this (and it will be) is ignored. If European sympathizers for European difference want to put their money where their mouth is, they will realize that the making of a new European is through the slow transformation of language in the general curriculum (and therefore in the everyday) from performative (driving a life) into performance (synecdochic/metonymic reflex or choice) by way of class-access. Depth-training in the languages (and therefore in the lingual memories) of difference should not be confined only to the ethnic group that 'owns' the language. Students from 'old Europe' should be encouraged to take them. That is the program of the rearrangement of desires that education must assume. This is to give flesh to Balibar's fighting words: 'What is demanded of the school is not that it be 'neutral' like the state, but that it carry out a neutralization or constitute an additional neutrality between two non-neutral 'spaces'—what we call 'private' and 'public'—in a way that avoids confusing them.'²⁶ One can then hope that the abuse of gender will be curbed in the public sphere, equality between men and women will begin to have an operative sense, undoing the from-above polarity between recognition and assimilation.²⁷ The instrumentality of gendering in what one can call the underived private is affected by all this but is also relatively autonomous, perhaps even relatively sovereign, if such a contradiction can be risked.

The grounding condition is that formula above: find out what specific case of inequality brings about the use of difference and who can deny it on occasion. For the 'use' of difference is to go toward reproductive heteronormativity, when class-access is denied across the board. It is only then that some of us might be able to keep in mind that what escapes the performative stereotypes of reproductive heteronormativity is the singularity of the event. We are nowhere near there in the gender politics—whatever they may be—in allochthonic Europe—wherever it may be. I hope by now you realize that this is not to deny the importance of the seemingly unending struggle on the ground, but rather to imagine its disappearance.

25 For an explanation of this through the philosophical insights of psychoanalysis, see Tim Dean 2002. 'Art as Symptom: Žižek and the Ethics of Psychoanalysis', *Diacritics* 32(2) (Summer), pp. 33-36. As is my wont, I profit from psychoanalysis as philosophy rather than science, if such a distinction can be sustained.

26 Balibar, 'Dissonances', p. 357.

27 Balibar, *Europe*, p.62, n.8.

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