THE PROBLEM OF THE FEMINIST SUBJECT
AND
BUTLER'S ALTERNATIVE

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ABSTRACT

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According to the poststructuralist understanding of power, since there is no position prior to, or independent of, the normative operations of power, neither the identity nor the category of the subject can be formulated independently of social and cultural norms. Correspondingly, there cannot be an identity category that is universally representative. However, in the case of feminism, since such understanding seems to mean rejecting the autonomy of the subject and restraining the possibility of collectivity, it is criticized by some feminist theorists. Judith Butler, with the terms *parodic repetition* and *contingent foundations*, aims to reformulate the feminist subject by refusing modernism but without perpetuating the problems of postmodernism. In this sense, Butler's theory promises a solution to the ongoing discussion of the problem of the feminist subject. In this study, Butler's critique of the feminist subject is analyzed and the reliability of the alternatives that are presented as a tool for an emancipatory movement is interrogated.

Keywords: Judith Butler, feminist subject, postmodernism, parodic repetition, contingent foundations

ÖZ

FEMİNİST ÖZNE PROBLEMİ VE BUTLER'IN ALTERNATİFİ

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Postyapısalcı iktidar anlayışına göre, iktidarın normatif işleyişinden önce veya ondan bağımsız bir konum bulunmadığı için öznenin ne kimliği ne de kategorisi sosyal ve kültürel normlardan bağımsız olarak formüle edilebilir. Buna bağlı olarak, evrensel temsili olan bir kimlik kategorisi mümkün değildir. Ancak feminizm söz konusu olduğunda, böyle bir anlayış öznenin özerkliğini reddetmek ve kolektivite olasılığını sınırlamak anlamına geliyor gibi göründüğü için bazı feminist teorisyenler tarafından eleştirilir. Judith Butler *parodik tekrar* ve *olumsal temeller* terimleriyle modernizmi reddederek ama postmodernizmin sorunlarını sürdürmeden feminist özneyi yeniden formüle etmeyi amaçlar. Bu şekilde, feminist özne sorununa ilişkin sürmekte olan tartışmaya bir çözüm vadeder. Bu çalışmada Butler'ın feminist özne eleştirisi incelenmekte ve bir özgürleşme hareketi için araç olarak sunduğu alternatiflerin güvenilirliği sorgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Judith Butler, feminist özne, postmodernizm, parodik tekrar, olumsal temeller

To Alper Sapan
in the name of those who dare to imagine otherwise

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Traditional or pre-postmodern feminism considered that the subject's sovereignty is necessary for autonomy since it assumed that only a subject that is independent of power can resist power and accordingly be autonomous. It also assumed that the category of feminist subject's universality is necessary for the subject to be represented and to be able to create collectivity. However, with the shift to postmodernism, modern feminism has been problematized due to the identity and the category of the feminist subject it assumed. According to the postmodernist approach, the subject cannot be thought transcendental, i.e., independent from the social and cultural conditions where its identity is constructed. Accordingly, there cannot be a universal foundation for the category of the subject.

With the shift to postmodernism, the effort to describe a universal foundation for the category "woman" mostly ended. Instead, the possibility of such a foundation started to be questioned, leading to a "crisis of identity" in feminist theory (Alcoff). Feminists who adopt the postmodern understanding of the subject have rejected any foundation for the category of woman and have introduced the feminist subject, "woman," as something socially constituted. However, like the claim of a universal foundation, the rejection of any foundation for the feminist subject has been problematized and caused controversies. Considering that the postmodern approach may endanger the possibility of any feminist movement by making a universal category of woman impossible, it is taken as an attack on feminism itself. Thus, anti-foundationalism is opposed by some feminist theorists. For example, in *Interpreting Gender*, Linda Nicholson rhetorically

asks "if we do not possess some common criteria providing meaning to the word woman, how can we generate a politics around this term? Does not feminist politics require that the category of woman have some determinate meaning" (100)? Similarly, In *Feminist Contentions*, Şeyla Benhabib notes this crisis of identity and problematizes the postmodern approach by pointing out its potential conclusions for the feminist movement. Benhabib writes:

> [F]eminist theory is undergoing a profound identity crisis at the moment. The postmodernist position(s) thought through to their conclusions may eliminate not only the specificity of feminist theory but place in question the very emancipatory ideals of the women's movements altogether. (20)

By formulating the subject "as a social, historical, or linguistic artifact" and eliminating "all essentialist concepts," postmodernism, according to Jane Flax, makes the human being "decentered" (32). In the case of feminism, this seems to mean precluding "the possibility of formulating one, true 'women's perspective'" and accordingly "the possibility of liberating political action" (Hekman 132, 153). Since such formulation of the subject also seems to mean abandoning values of the Enlightenment, such as autonomy, freedom, and justice (which are considered inseparable from feminist theory), it has also been criticized. Benhabib, for example, interrogates the autonomy of the postmodern subject by asking how one can "be constituted by discourse without being determined by it" (110).

Simply put, postmodern feminism has been criticized that it endangers feminism by precluding the possibility of an emancipatory political movement.

Considering that feminism aims to create change in the social order, the possibility of such a movement is necessary. In other words, even though "[a]chieving a global feminist theory without totalizing, without mastery" (Wicke and Ferguson 9) is a desired aim, it is still being discussed how an emancipatory political movement is possible without providing a criterion for the political subject and correspondingly for a foundation for the category of woman.

In order to interpret the ongoing discussion of the problem of the feminist subject, in this study, the historical transformation of the subject of feminism will be analyzed by

focusing on the shift from modern to postmodern feminism. Neither postmodernism nor feminism always allows a clear-cut definition since "they are discourses on the move, ready to leap over borders and confound boundaries" (*Ibid.* 2). That is why there are various usages of the term postmodernism and different approaches to feminism. In *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard uses the term postmodernism "to signify a critique of foundationalism" (Nicholson, "Feminism and the Politics of Postmodernism" 54). Disregarding the fact that "'postmodernism' is a highly contested term, about which not even those who identify [themselves] as 'postmodernists' agree" (Roseneil 162), I will follow Lyotard's convention and use the term for pointing to the rejection of the modern, that is, universalist and foundationalist, formulation of the subject.

The aim of this study is to analyze Judith Butler's critique of the feminist subject and interrogate the reliability of the alternatives that she/they[1] present(s) as a tool for an emancipatory movement. Butler aims to reformulate the feminist subject by refusing modernism but without perpetuating the problems of postmodernism. With the term parodic repetition, they oppose the necessity of a sovereign subject for autonomy, and with the term contingent foundations, they oppose the necessity of universality for collectivity. In this way, Butler argues that the rejection of the subject prior to its social construction does not necessarily mean precluding the possibility of an emancipatory political movement. In this sense, their theory promises a solution to the ongoing discussion of the problem of the feminist subject. However, even though they introduce alternative ways for resistance and change, I will argue that Butler's argumentation has problematic sides since this resistance is not applicable to all feminist concerns and since the direction of this change is undetermined.

In the first section of this study, I will address the problem of the feminist subject and different feminist approaches to this problem. Firstly, I will briefly explain the three waves of feminism. While the categories presented by the first wave and the second

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[1] Butler uses both she/her and they/them pronouns but prefers the latter. Therefore, in this study, they/them pronouns are used to refer to Butler. In order to avoid any confusion, it is important to note that the secondary literature that is used in this study uses she/her pronouns to refer to Butler since it belongs to the period when Butler did not come out as non-binary yet.

wave will be found discriminatory because of their essentialist approach, the third wave's constructionist approach will be presented as a "problematic" response to the deficiencies of the previous waves. Then, I will introduce three dominant postmodern approaches that diverge according to how, or whether, they construct the feminist subject. Specifically, we will see that while difference feminism and diversity feminism have introduced a concept of "woman," deconstruction feminism rejects any concept prior to the process of social construction, including "woman." By associating with these approaches, two political approaches (that diverge according to whether or not they consider constructing a subject as a necessity for an emancipatory movement) will be unpacked: associational and agonistic.

In the second section, I will present Butler's theory of performativity as an opposition to the assumption that a sovereign subject is required for autonomy. By defining the identity-gaining process as something performative, Butler assigns agency to the postmodern subject. With their term "parodic repetition," they argue that norms (that we owe for our gendered identity) look natural as a result of constant repetition and so resisting them is possible by repeating them subversively. In this way, Butler presents a way for the feminist subject to resist norms without being defined, and/or staying outside of them.

In the third section, I will present Butler's term "contingent foundations" as a midway point of the different formulations of the feminist subject. In the most general sense, it seems that while, according to the formulation of modern feminism, the subject is based on a foundation, the postmodern formulation of the subject is anti-foundationalist. Butler, on the other hand, avoids both the problematic formulation of the foundationalist approach that causes discrimination and the danger of anti-foundationalism that restrains collectivity. By taking not universality but contingency as a foundation for the feminist subject, they not only present a category for the subject but also make the category open to different interpretations. However, since such a category is unconstrained by some universal or power-independent standard, it does not guarantee that it will retain feminist purposes or reject anti-feminist ones.

In the last section, I will focus on Butler's later works. Considering these works, I will reconsider the problem I addressed in the previous section. I will argue that these problems are caused by the lack of normativity in Butler's argumentation, and even though they gesture a sense of normativity in their later works, their account is not sufficient to make a distinction between positive and negative resignification and, accordingly, cannot eliminate the risk of losing direction for the feminist movement.

CHAPTER 2

THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

In the second half of the twentieth century, political movements – such as second-wave feminism, Black Civil Rights, and so on – that act against the injustices done to particular social groups emerged. By having political positions based on social or identity groups rather than traditional political parties, they have aimed to provide action to counter discrimination against these groups and to make them more visible in the socio-political sphere. In accordance with this aim, some political theories develop an idea of representation based on a certain description of human nature. Since identity-based politics aims to represent a specific group of people against acts of discrimination and injustice, it has to describe some specific criteria to refer to its subject. However, it is undeniable that this necessitates categorization, classification, and, correspondingly, differentiation. That is why, even though the aim of the identity-based political movements is to focus on underprivileged aspects of identity, and in this way demand justice for marginalized groups, the necessity of introducing social groups with specific criteria obstructs the consideration of the different aspects of identity. Generally speaking, identity politics has been problematized due to "the kind of self" it produces, and because of "the kind of collectivity" it precludes (Bickford 112). In other words, identity politics' formulations of subjectivity and collectivity have been criticized since it promotes "certain kinds of political action" (*Ibid.*) and prevents other and different kinds. For example, when the subjectivity of black women is formulated by considering only their gender, the problems they experience related to their race cannot be addressed. Similarly, when a category is assigned to black women by ignoring their gender and they are defined simply as members of the black community, their experiences as women would be ignored. Thus, such formulation of

black woman's subjectivity is an obstacle to addressing the problems they face as black or as women in their political action. In other words, since the idea of universal representation (i.e., assigning to people a category that is based on a certain description of human nature, such as "woman" or "black") is considered a necessity to be able to introduce political subjects and make them visible in the political sphere, identity-based political theories are conducted with the idea of a universal category that is unavoidably discriminatory.

In a similar vein, in order to make women visible as political subjects, the category of woman seems necessary for feminism. However, as is the case with any categorization, the category of woman has to be exclusive because it makes an attempt to define a universal nature of women and, thereby, only includes women that comply with a certain set of criteria. However, no criteria for categorization would be comprehensive enough. This is because as long as a definition of womanhood is made, it seems that there is unavoidable exclusion. For example, when the subject of feminism is defined as people who are assigned female sex at birth by ignoring gender identities, trans women will be out of such formulation of subjectivity and accordingly excluded from the category of the feminist subject. That is, as long as we identify a particular group of people and say who or what they are, we also say who or what they are not. Hence, making a definition is exclusive by its very nature. Accordingly, feminism cannot avoid being exclusive. This is because of its need to define a category of woman in order to represent women as political subjects. In other words, whilst feminism seems to be obligated to present a universal nature of women (i.e., what it is to be a 'woman') in order to define women and talk about them as political entities, there is no such definition that is independent of exclusive or even discriminatory presuppositions. As Linda Alcoff writes, "[i]n attempting to speak for women, feminism often seems to presuppose that it knows what women truly are, but such an assumption is foolhardy given that every source of knowledge about women has been contaminated with misogyny and sexism" (405, 406). When we examine the history of feminism, we can see how its subject, namely "woman," has evolved with the intention of attaining a more comprehensive categorization and how every attempt to come up with a sufficiently comprehensive categorization has failed. The impossibility of universal

categorization causes an internal debate within feminism regarding the definition of women/womanhood. Since any description that would be used for the category of woman necessarily points to a limited group, some sort of disagreement on how the description should/should not be, and what characteristics need to be included or excluded, is inevitable.

Since what feminism does is "interrogating existing conditions and relations of power with a view toward not only interpreting but also changing the world … the philosophical and analytical debates that arise from feminist theorizing are unavoidably political (not purely philosophical)" (Dietz 400). As feminist theory aims to establish not only a political theory but also a political movement, it does not seem likely that it can rule out the existing conditions of politics. Since representational feminist politics necessitates "to speak as and for women" and since conducting such politics is "virtually impossible without recourse to identity politics" (Butler, "Feminist Contentions" 49), it seems that feminism needs to present an identity category in order to be representative. However, at the same time, it is impossible to come up with a sufficiently comprehensive definition for such a category because of the certain criteria it necessitates for its subject. In this sense, it seems that one of the most challenging issues that feminist theory has to deal with is to give an account for the criteria of its subject, i.e., "woman." The criteria that are used to conceptualize "woman" and the foundation that is assigned for this category are often problematized, and these are the reasons for the current controversies in feminist theory. In the most general sense, it seems that approaches to the problem of the feminist subject and its representation are historically based on different formulations of "woman" and diversified according to how identity is understood. Even today, there is "no agreement in feminist theory about the meaning and status of the concept 'women' or 'gender identity,' nor even consensus about how to appropriate gender as a useful category of analysis" (Dietz 400). According to Chantal Mouffe, "[s]uch consensus does not exist. We have to accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always entails some form of exclusion" (104). Considering that women are the subjects of oppressions that are caused by the way the patriarchal system defines them, achieving a consensus about

the definition of woman seems necessary at first glance. However, in parallel with the question of whether there is such a consensus, the question of whether it is possible to come up with a definition has been raised. In order to argue against the patriarchal definition of woman/womanhood, feminists take two different stands: they either claim that "feminists have the exclusive right to describe and evaluate woman" or reject "the possibility of defining woman as such at all" (Alcoff 406, 407). Generally speaking, in the first two waves of feminism, or what we may call pre-postmodernism, feminists held on to the first stand and introduced a definition of woman. However, with the shift to postmodernism, the possibility of such a definition began to be questioned.

2.1. Three Waves of Feminism

The first wave of feminism prevailed in the 19th and early 20th centuries – from the 1840s to the 1920s (McAfee and Howard) – and was mainly concerned with obtaining basic human rights for women, such as property rights and the right to vote. Its primary focus was on the right to vote. The "passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1919, granting women voting rights" (Drucker) is considered the terminal point of this wave. Thus, in the most general sense, it seems we can say that the subject of the first wave of feminism was people who were prevented from exercising the right to vote in a constitutional democracy because of their sex. This wave was criticized for imposing a dominant identity and therefore being discriminatory since it focused primarily on middle-class, white, and western women. The first wave presented itself as a movement of "woman" while it represented just a particular group of women. To be truly representative, political theories need to give an account of the aspect of identity they focused on or ignored. However, by ignoring different aspects of identity, the first wave did not take women of different classes, races, and so on into account. The first wave excluded non-white, non-middle-class

women's experiences and demanded "assimilation to its own ideals" (Zerilli, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Judgment" 298). Since it was formed by an overly limited group and since "certain decisions are legitimated only by the representativeness of those who take them" (Philips 186), the representational power of the first wave and its legitimacy claim as a political movement seemed insufficient. To be more specific, the right to vote was considered the main problem since the representatives of this wave were middle-class, white women who do not experience racial or class-related discrimination. That is, for instance, race-gender mixed analysis/representation was thought not to be needed since the women representing this wave were white. For this reason, they introduced a concept of "woman" that has no race, and accordingly, this wave's representational power was insufficient considering such concept of woman does not address the problems of women of color. That is why the subject of the first wave was questioned. Non-white, non-middle-class, and non-western women have been questioning the category of woman (as defined by the first wave) since the 1970s (McAfee and Howard).

Black feminism, for example, came into existence as a reaction to the first wave. It argued that by focusing only on white, western women and their concerns, the first wave presented a racist understanding of the subject. According to proponents of Black feminism, black women are exposed to discrimination in different ways than white women.

According to Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, Black women are experiencing sex discrimination and race discrimination at the same time and in a unique way. She argues that even though at the first glance, it seems that any issue that affects black people and women includes black women, most of the time, their experience is not equal to black men's or white women's:

> Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination-the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience discrimination as Black women-not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women. ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" 149)

Calling this a "frame problem," Crenshaw argues that as long as the frame of gender discrimination and race discrimination is not broad enough to include black women, black women's problems cannot be addressed and accordingly cannot be solved (*Ibid.*). Domestic violence, for instance, is black women's problem as much as white women's, and stereotypes and negative beliefs about the Black community are black women's problem as much as black men's. However, when black women are subjected to domestic violence, "[they] are often reluctant to call the police, a hesitancy likely due to a general unwillingness among people of color to subject their private lives to the scrutiny and control of a police force that is frequently hostile" (Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins" 1257). That is, for women of color, domestic violence is a problem that has multiple layers; since these women are subjected both to race discrimination and sex discrimination, their experience of domestic violence is not the same as white women. In a similar fashion, Crenshaw explicates why the "representatives from various minority communities opposed the release of [the statistics of domestic violence]" (*Ibid.* 1253) thus:

> They were concerned, apparently, that the data would unfairly represent Black and Brown communities as unusually violent, potentially reinforcing stereotypes that might be used in attempts to justify oppressive police tactics and other discriminatory practices. These misgivings are based on the familiar and not unfounded premise that certain minority groups-especially Black men-have already been stereotyped as uncontrollably violent. (*Ibid.*)

Hence, ignoring factors such as race, ethnicity, etc. simply means ignoring the problems of women who experience these problems in a different way because of their race and ethnicity. This problematization of the feminist subject shows us that assigning a specific definition to the subject of a political group poses a danger for political representation since it "reinforces an oppressive hierarchy [by claiming] that particular identities are essential or natural, as we saw with race" (Heyes)**.** In other words, considering the problem of the subject in the first wave, it seems that identity politics can pose a danger of domination and discrimination. The necessity of defining an identity for the group that such politics represents can result in a dominant identity being imposed upon the more marginal members of the group. Such domination causes discrimination because of the presupposition of the identity it represents i.e., the assumption of what being something truly is. For this reason, feminists in the second

wave acted according to the idea that there was a need to modify the mainstream movement and make its subject more comprehensive. While the subject of the first wave feminism was western, white, middle-class women, the subject of the second wave feminism was constructed by considering additional factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. Feminists in the second wave attempted to demonstrate that oppressions of these features were related to each other and to consider all of them was fundamental for the feminist movement.

The second wave, which began in the 1960s and "emerged through women's solidarity movements and new forms of reflection that uncovered sexist attitudes" (McAfee and Howard), sought equal rights in the social and legal sphere. That is, in this wave, equal rights had been sought by addressing not only legal rights that are given to a person by the legal system such as the right to vote, but also addressing social rights that refer to equal treatments in the social sphere such as equal distribution of household chores, equal job opportunities, and so on. Feminists of this wave argued that some specific roles are "socially" assigned to a specific gender. In this way, they opposed these social roles caused by male-dominated assumptions, such as the one that assumes that women's place is home since they are maternal, or women should not be in politics since they are emotional or irrational. One of the most crucial moves of this movement was separating the biological identification of a woman from the socially constructed one, especially by Gayle Rubin's account of the "sex/gender system." According to this system, biological sex is a constant, but this does not mean that it defines the social roles of men and women. While sex refers to the biological body, gender refers to the social construction of the body or, more correctly, the meaning or symbolic significance of the body. According to Rubin, this distinction refers to "a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be" (165). Since it associates gender roles, and the resulting oppression caused by these roles, with social conditions which are not constant unlike biological conditions, the sex/gender system negated the idea of biological destiny and created an area for the possibility of change. For this reason, this system of differentiation was considered an important tool to point out and

struggle with the injustices enforced on women. However, it has been criticized by the third wave since it creates a category of woman with a biological foundation and presents this foundation as the universal subject of feminist politics. That is, even though the subject category it formulated included women of different races, ethnicities, and classes, it excluded people such as intersex, trans, or anyone who has different anatomical characteristics since the subject of this category was cisgender women. Accordingly, such formulation of the feminist subject has been criticized for not being comprehensive enough. In other words, whilst it seemed that the subject of feminism became more inclusive with the second wave, for feminists in the third wave it was still problematic since the presupposition of the identity it represents.

The third wave of feminism emerged – "as a consequence of the rise of postmodernism" (Snyder 175) – with the aim of continuing and reacting to the movement of the second wave. Adopting the postmodernist understanding of the subject, it criticizes foundationalism and problematizes the subject of the second wave because of its universality claim. According to the third wave, taking sex and the body as biological foundations is problematic since they are also social constructions, just like gender. Providing a foundation to the category of woman makes the feminist subject exclusionary by imposing on everyone what is socially acceptable and by oppressing what is not, since there is no foundation prior to the construction of the subject by social, political, or even cultural norms, meanings, and authorities. In this sense, it seems that problematic formulations of the subject – including the second wave's formulation – are caused by the fact that they disregard "structural dynamics of power" (McNay 9). According to Lois McNay, these problematic identity claims are combined with "a simplified understanding of power and its operations with regard to the formation of subjectivity and the construction of oppression" (47). "Gender oppression, for example, is misunderstood by being construed as, in its essence, a form of interpersonally engendered misrecognition rather than also as systemically generated oppression" (*Ibid.* 48). In general terms, while the first and second waves of feminism take an essentialist approach to the feminist subject by assigning a foundation to it, the third wave of feminism takes a constructivist approach to the feminist subject by claiming the impossibility of a universal foundation. That is, the

first two waves introduced a feminist subject whose essence was believed to be misrecognized/misrepresented by patriarchal power. Feminists, in these two waves, focused on the relation between this kind of subject and this kind of power and considered an anti-power position as a necessity for the emancipation of the feminist subject. In the third wave, on the other hand, the subject is not independent of power and its norms. Accordingly, choosing between anti-power and pro-power positions is rejected since according to feminists of this wave, power is something not only oppresses the subject but also produces it.

Simply put, adopting identity politics by ignoring its inadequacies has been found to be problematic. However, at the same time, since "identity cannot be jettisoned from feminist theory or politics altogether" (Zivi 339), contemporary feminists have adopted the idea that "identity and politics must be theorized together" (*Ibid.*). That is why, as a response to problematic ones in the 1980s, different approaches to, and formulations of, identity began to emerge and the subject of "woman" started to be questioned. Feminists have been carrying on the work of conceptualizing the feminist subject without basing it on a universal or a biological foundation since the 1980s as I will explain in detail below.

2.2. The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory

With the shift to constructivism, feminists have rejected any universal foundation for the feminist subject by claiming that it is a social construction. However, they needed to give an account of the construction of the feminist subject. In her article, *Current Controversies in Feminist Theory*, Mary G. Dietz argues that during the 1980s and 1990s, controversies in feminist theory were mostly based on the question of "how (and whether) to construct a subject of feminism under the category of woman or women" (402). The current controversies, for her, were simply about whether or not there is a concept of woman "that stands prior to the elaboration of women's interests

or point of view" (*Ibid.*). Dietz introduces the dominant approaches to the problem of the feminist subject by schematizing them as "difference feminism," "diversity feminism," and "deconstruction feminism."

Difference feminism is divided into "social" and "symbolic" ones but both versions identify woman within a gender binary system and associate women's subordination with the patriarchal system. It "is preoccupied with revaluing 'women' or the feminine in order to affirm a positive account of the female side of the gender binary or the female aspect of sexual difference" (*Ibid.*). Such an approach to the feminist subject has been criticized since it implies a universal foundation for the category of woman. By identifying women with their differences from men i.e., by theorizing the feminist subject with the gender binary system, it reduces women's subordination to a source that is presented as universal. Specifically, it assigns the female aspect of the gender binary to women and in this way implies an essence for woman. Since it implies an essence for woman and reduces the subordination of women to a negative account of this essence, this approach presented a universal foundation for the category of woman, and as stated before, such a foundation has been problematized by claiming that it is not comprehensive enough.

Diversity feminism, on the other hand, "questions the primacy of sexual or gender difference and its elision of other collective forms of difference and identity" (*Ibid.* 403). It "complicates and multiplies the concept [of woman] by considering race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and other ascriptive identity categories" (*Ibid.* 402). That is, this approach questions the subject formulation of difference feminism and aims to take different identities of the subject category of feminism into account by considering multiple sources of identification. However, such an approach to the feminist subject has been criticized since there is still an assumption of the essence of woman. Even though it multiplies the feminist subject and introduces different versions of woman, this approach presupposes that there is a consensus about what "woman" is and accordingly implies that there is an essence of woman.

Generally speaking, both difference feminism and diversity feminism present a concept of "woman" and aim to provide an emancipatory movement by elucidating

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how it is constructed. By basing the concept of "woman" not on essentialism but construction, they have aimed to introduce a feminist subject that is relieved of the problematic formulation of the modern subject.

Deconstruction feminism, on the contrary, takes issue with introducing any concept of "woman" and with considering it as a foundation of the feminist movement. It rejects "any notion of an a priori female subject grounded in a presexed body" since according to its perspective, "neither sex nor the body are brute, passive, or given; they constitute systems of meaning, signification, performance, reiteration, and representation" (*Ibid.*).

In parallel with these two different approaches to the concept of "women," with respect to the question of whether the latter is to be rejected, two different approaches have been taken in feminist politics. Feminist political theorists have brought a new dimension to the debate on the feminist subject. They have done this by questioning whether constructing a subject is necessary for an emancipatory movement rather than dwelling on the question of how to construct a subject of feminism under the category of woman.

The first approach – i.e., the associational approach – is associated with diversity feminism since it theorizes politics "in terms of the proliferation, negotiation, and coordination of multiple, intersecting identities, selves, or groups" (*Ibid.* 419). Associationalists "scrutinize the conditions of exclusion in order to theorize the emancipation of the subject" (*Ibid.* 422). According to this approach, elucidating how the subject is constructed is a necessity for leading the way in an emancipatory movement.

According to Crenshaw, for instance, theorizing politics by considering the intersectionality of identities is necessary for raising our awareness of unique experiences and being able to address them. As stated before, she argues that as long as the frames of sexism and racism are not broad enough to include black women, considering the experiences of black women is not possible. According to her, when racism and sexism overlap (as they often do), they create multiple levels of social

injustice, and women of color are exposed to injustice in the context of both racism and sexism.

One of the cases Crenshaw refers to, in order to exemplify her point, is Emma DeGraffenreid's case ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" 141-143). DeGraffenreid is an African-American woman who sued the company she applied for a job claiming that the company subjected her to sexism and racism since she believes that she was not hired because she is a black woman. However, ignoring that most of the African-American employees are male and most of the women employees are white, the suit was found legally inconsequential and dismissed since the employer did hire African-Americans and women.

The point that Crenshaw wants to make is that socially marginalized people are affected by multiple dimensions of injustices and face unique challenges as a consequence of intersectionality; e.g. intersections of race and gender, heterosexism, transphobia, xenophobia, and ableism. That is why, for her, politics needs to be theorized considering the coordination of multiple and intersecting identities.

The latter approach – i.e., the agonistic approach – on the other hand, is related to deconstruction feminism since it rejects any identity-based formulation. While the associationalists are looking for a way for an emancipatory movement by elucidating the subject's construction and the conditions of exclusion, agonists "deconstruct emancipatory procedures to disclose how the subject is both produced through political exclusions and positioned against them" (Dietz 422). According to the agonistic approach, the effort to formulate a notion of "woman" – whether it is multiplied or not – by ignoring that the criterion assigned to the feminist subject is problematic (since it does not and cannot have universally representational power) and makes it an obstacle for feminism to conduct efficient politics. As an agonist, Butler argues that "the unproblematic invocation of that category may prove to preclude the possibility of feminism as a representational politics" ("Gender Trouble" 9). However, when conceptualizing the category of "woman" is considered as a necessity in order to theorize the emancipation of the subject, the rejection of such conceptualization and such a category seems to preclude the feminist movement.

Generally speaking, while associational theorists aim to create a coalition not by introducing a foundation but, rather, by reaching a consensus, the effort to reach a consensus, for agonistic theorists, can result in the exclusion and obscuring of minorities (who would fall outside such consensus) and create an obstacle to a comprehensive debate. However, even though such a claim is right, at the same time it is problematic for a collective movement since it is individualistic and poses an obstacle to the idea of politics as a coalition. Considering feminism as a collective movement, the rejection of any possible consensus poses an obstacle for feminism since it restrains the aim of unification. The reason of the associational approach's insistence on the category of women and consensus is its desire to be able to create a collective movement. Associationalists try to conceptualize a notion of woman since without a consensus about the feminist subject i.e., without determining whose movement feminism is, unifying and acting under the name of feminist movement does not seem possible. To be more specific, feminism concerns the problems of people who are subordinated because of their gender. Even though it complicates the formulation of the subject it represents by considering the additional and intersecting factors that cause discrimination, there is an agreement in feminism on the basic that it is a movement that act against gender discrimination. That is to say, for agonists, since any consensus necessitates a determination (in this case, a determination of what gender is) and thereby causes exclusion, the effort to reach a consensus is problematic. However, for associationalists, the unification and political action of feminism necessitate such determination.

For agonists, on the contrary, political action does not necessitate such a category. Besides being problematic, according to them, such formulation of a stable subject is not necessary for the political action of feminism since "politics is essentially a practice of creation, reproduction, transformation, and articulation (not coalition)" (Dietz 422; Mouffe). For agonists, since the "subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and again" (Butler, "Feminist Contentions" 47), the category of women (such as any subject category) is "the empty signifier;" it is the "articulation of a political identity" (Zerilli, "This Universalism Which Is Not One" 19). That is, for agonists, the effort to elucidate how the subject is constructed (by

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considering it as a product) and to consider it as a source of political action (by considering it as a ground) is problematic since the subject is "neither as a ground nor a product, but the permanent possibility of a certain resignifying process" (Butler, "Feminist Contentions" 47). According to the agonist approach, politics is a matter of engaging in a conflict, contest, and struggle. That is, politics, for agonists, is not something that ought to be conducted through the construction and categorization of an agreed-upon understanding of the subject, but through conflict and rivalry between different understandings and conceptualizations.

For instance, for Butler, presenting a strictly defined subject category causes a commitment to the subject's subordination. As an agonist, they argue that the emancipation of the subject is possible through contesting hegemonic norms. According to them, since creating such conflict destabilizes the meaning of oppressive norms, it makes room for an aspect that makes it possible to reinterpret them. This is how resistance is possible for Butler, as I will detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

AUTONOMY AND RESISTANCE

One of the reasons why postmodern feminism has been problematized is that it abandons the values of the Enlightenment, especially the value of autonomy, which is considered inseparable from feminist theory. Traditionally, the autonomy of the subject has been based on an understanding of the subject as transcendental i.e., as something that transcends/is independent of social conditions. That is, a sovereign subject has been required for autonomy. That is why defining the subject as a social construction, as something that depends on and is a production of its social conditions, makes its autonomy questionable.

Judith Butler presented a performative perspective on the feminist subject by formulating identity as something not simply given to us and passively internalized but also as something that we live and whose construction depends on our active participation ("Gender Trouble"). By defining the identity-gaining process as the process of never-ending norm repetition, they assign agency to the postmodern subject and thereby create space for resistance and change. In this way, Butler provides an alternative way to contest norms. According to them, with *parodic repetition*, individuals can resist norms and even change them, without mistakenly assuming that there is a position outside norms.

3.1. The Possibility of Taking a Position Outside the Web of Norms

According to Butler, we gain our identities by repeating the norms of social structure; that is, the grid of intelligibility and meaning we were born and socialized into. This grid has the tendency of presenting itself as natural and it (or, more correctly, the naturalized version of it) is what Butler calls power. This grid (i.e., power) is the producer of anything – including the subject – in the web of norms. We, and our world, gain their meaning through the web of norms; hence, there is no prediscursive identity and meaning. Since this constant repetition is the way in which we acquire our gender and sexual identities, we need to repeat these social and cultural norms to become who we are. That is why Butler argues that "no assertion of universality takes place apart from a cultural norm" ("Contingency, Hegemony, Universality" 35). In other words, since there is nothing independent the normative operations of power, and since our world of meanings is produced by the web of norms, what is intelligible or socially acceptable is determined by the cultural context. As the grid determines what it means to be intelligible, meaningful, socially recognizable, and livable, and as we acquire our socially meaningful identity through society, following norms is necessary to be recognizable. To be perceived as a man, for example, is to act like a man by following the norms of masculinity, i.e., the *citation* of the norms of masculinity.

However, since the boundaries of the domain of intelligible citations can only be drawn by the production and then separation of the domain of unintelligible citations, according to Butler, the grid produces not only what is intelligible but also what is unintelligible.

> According to Butler, a grid of cultural intelligibility produces not only the domain of the livable and intelligible, but also the domain of the unlivable and unintelligible. This means that the same grid functions as a context of choice and meaning for some, yet as a context of no-choice and no-meaning for others. … Butler emphasizes, as well as includes in her theorization of individual identity formation, the fact that the cultural context of intelligibility also defines the boundaries of the unimaginable and the limits of the feasible. (Karademir 130)

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For example, "for heterosexuality to remain intact as a distinct social form, it requires an intelligible conception of homosexuality and also requires the prohibition of that conception in rendering it culturally unintelligible" (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 98). In other words, to be able to define it, what is socially acceptable should be differentiated from what is socially unacceptable. Since their definition determines each other, the conceptions/determinations of both the intelligible and the unintelligible are needed. That is, there is always a need for the *constitutive outside*.

That is why identity is necessarily constituted by exclusion. By stigmatizing the other, the normal maintains its domain. One can act like a man only through *abjection*: by rejecting being like a woman, by excluding the "woman" from one's acts and bodily expressions, and, thus, by distinguishing oneself from being a woman. That is to say, the concept of *the other* is always needed for identification. For this reason, "the subject cannot be self-present" (Bapty and Yates 20). That is, since identification necessitates the other, the identity of the subject is always incomplete. For Butler, the incompleteness of the identity is a condition for identity construction.

> [T]he 'incompleteness' of each and every identity is a direct result of its differential emergence: no particular identity can emerge without presuming and enacting the exclusion of others, and this constitutive exclusion or antagonism is the shared and equal condition of all identity-constitution. ("Contingency, Hegemony, Universality" 31)

According to Butler, this process, i.e., the process of acquiring an identity, begins with what Althusser calls *interpellation*; in other words, by being called a name and treated according to that name. Butler writes,

> Consider the medical interpellation which ... shifts an infant from an "it" to a "she" or a "he," and in that naming, the girl is "girled," brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that "girling" of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reenforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm. ("Bodies That Matter" 7,8)

This also implies that what strengthens the norm – in this case, gender norms – and makes it look natural is the never-ending repetition. Since there is no intelligible/recognizable identity without gender, gender norms are constantly

repeated. The constant repetition of norms makes the norms we repeat look natural and, in this way, creates the illusion that they are stable over time. In this sense, our identities are the conclusions of the constant performance of norms. Our gender identity, for Butler, is the *sedimental effect* of this norm-repetition process. Since gender comes into existence and acquires its meaning through the normative operations of power, it cannot be thought separate from or prior to the operation from which it emerged. Butler writes:

> The question, however, of what qualifies as "gender" is itself already a question that attests to a pervasively normative operation of power, a fugitive operation of "what will be the case" under the rubric of "what is the case." Thus, the very description of the field of gender is no sense prior to, or separable from, the question of its normative operation. ("Gender Trouble" xxi)

For Butler, like gender, sex comes into existence and acquires its meaning with the repetition of norms. Sex is just an outcome of the constant repetition of norms but creates the illusion of being natural; it is, according to Butler, idealized by the repetition of norms:

> … then "the law of sex" is repeatedly fortified and idealized as the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law, produced as the law, the anterior and inapproximable ideal, by the very citations it is said to command. ("Bodies That Matter" 14)

Since gender is a concept about the norms that are socially associated with a certain sex and sex is a social construct like gender, for Butler, sex and gender are not terms that can be distinguished from each other. That is why the sex-gender distinction is pointless for them.

> If gender consists of the social meanings that sex assumes, then sex does not accrue social meanings as additive properties but, rather, is replaced by the social meanings it takes on; sex is relinquished in the course of that assumption, and gender emerges, not as a term in a continued relationship of opposition to sex, but as the term which absorbs and displaces "sex," the mark of its full substantiation into gender or what, from a materialist point of view, might constitute a full desubstantiation. (*Ibid.* 5)

That is to say, sex is absorbed by gender. "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice" (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 10). That is why neither gender/its content nor its

ground can be taken as a constant that is independent of the process of coming into existence thanks to repetition. In other words, since gender identity is socially constructed, since it is the result of the normative function of power, assuming that it has a stable ground and then talking about this ground as a criterion that is independent of the grid of norms is not reasonable.

The reason that feminists introduced such a ground, and the corresponding sex/gender distinction was to be able to question socially imposed oppressive norms from an objective standpoint. However, for Butler, there is no such ground since both sex and gender come into existence within the web of norms. That is why taking a position outside this grid is not possible and the struggle against the oppressive norms has to come from the inside. That is to say, since we become who we are through repeating norms, according to Butler, completely discarding those norms and getting rid of the normative operations of power is not possible.

By claiming that taking a position outside the grid we live in and talking about a criterion independent from it is not possible, Butler criticizes the traditional way of dealing with gender norms. They argue that gender norms can still be overcome without abandoning them and taking a position against norms is possible without being outside the web of norms. That is to say, for Butler, an internal struggle is possible, as I will explain in detail below.

3.2. Parodic Repetition as an Alternative Way of Dealing with Gender Norms

By claiming that identity is not something we passively internalize but an outcome of our constant norm-repetition, Butler refers to the correlation between identity and norms. Since this repetition is not a one-time act – it is a never-ending, constant process – these norms are subject to constant transformation. While we acquire our identities through repeating norms, norms gain their meaning and power through our repetition.

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That is to say, according to Butler, our identity, as well as the identity of norms, is *performative*. The theory of performativity "emphasize[s] the way in which the social world is made - and new social possibilities emerge - at various levels of social action through a collaborative relation with power" (Butler, "Contingency, Hegemony, Universality" 14). Identity is something performatively constituted, since "we not only assume identities, but also live them, this process of acting-out is inevitable" (Cornell, "Autonomy Re-Imagined" 145). That is why Butler claims that there is an opportunity to construct our identities in different ways.

Moreover, since every repetition occurs in different contexts and times, that is, since norms are repeated in different contexts and times norms are doomed to change. Since the process of acquiring an identity never ends and since the norms that we repeat are doomed to change, for Butler, repeating norms differently and constructing our identities in a different way is possible. To be more specific, for example, they state that "[i]f the category of 'sex' is established through repeated acts, then conversely, the social action of bodies within the cultural field can withdraw the very power of reality that they themselves invested in the category" ("Gender Trouble" 157, 158). It is true that our sexed bodies are the outcome/the sedimental effect of the act of repetition, and "[w]e cannot simply throw off the identities we have become" (Butler, "The Psychic Life of Power" 102). However, since norms become normalized through norm-repetition, and since their existence depends on our repetition, we have the option of withdrawing the power that they gain through our repetition by changing the way that we repeat norms. In this way, we can determine and control the degree of influence of norms on our lives. That is to say, by pointing out that norms are constantly changing and that being conditioned by them is the condition of agency, Butler points to the possibility of resisting them. They write:

> The norm does not produce the subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity; one invariably struggles with conditions of one's own life that one could not have chosen. If there is an operation of agency or, indeed, freedom in this struggle, it takes place in the context of an enabling and limiting field of constraint. ("Giving an Account of Oneself" 19)

The performative feminist view, according to Sharon Krause, is "making room within agency for forms of subjectivity and action that are nonsovereign but nevertheless potent" by "contesting the old assumption that agency equals autonomy" (108). That is to say, with the theory of performativity, Butler assigns norm-dependent agency to the poststructuralist subject and in a way that responds to Benhabib's question: how one can "be constituted by discourse without being determined by it" (110). For Butler,

> We may be tempted to think that to assume the subject in advance is necessary in order to safeguard the agency of the subject. But to claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined; on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, of not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked, resisted? ("Feminist Contentions" 46)

As long as norms acquire their meanings and power through our repetition, it seems that changing them and their effectiveness is possible. In this sense, Butler claims that being constituted by discourse is the condition of the subject's agency. It is what makes the subject capable of resisting norms and not being passively determined by them. That is why, according to Butler, what we need to avoid is not the repetition itself:

> That the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped—as if it could be. ("Gender Trouble" 42)

What we should try to avoid, for Butler, is not the repetition of norms but making norms unquestionable and hegemonic by strengthening them with constant repetition to the point of imitating earlier instances of repetition without variation. Instead of trying to escape from the web of norms, we need to avoid giving norms the power of introducing themselves as natural by creating the illusion that they exist independently of any discursive context. In this sense, "[t]he task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed to repeat, and through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable repetition itself" (*Ibid.* 189). Such avoidance, for Butler, is possible by repeating norms in an unexpected/unusual way, and by making their boundaries ambiguous. That is to say, hegemonic norms gain strength to determine our acts by presenting themselves as natural. Making their boundaries ambiguous overturns the determining power of these norms. In this way, we can resist

being determined by hegemonic norms. Such resistance, for Butler, is possible since norms are constantly changing and only create the illusion of being stable or natural. With the term parodic repetition, they describe the illusion of gender identity in the following way:

> The parodic repetition of gender exposes as well the illusion of gender identity as an intractable depth and inner substance. As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an "act," as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of "the natural" that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status. (*Ibid.* 187)

Butler takes gender as the effect of politically enforced performativity and from this point of view, they argue that it is open to self-parody and self-criticism. Since our gender identity, for them, is performative, since it is the sedimented effect of the constant repetition of gender norms and, in this sense, depends on our actions, it is open to a kind of reinterpretation and change. However, as Butler states, the question of what kind of repetition is crucial. "If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself" (*Ibid.* 42)?

However, as Martha Nussbaum argues, it is unclear what "the acts of resistance be like," and what "we expect them to accomplish." That is, Butler does not point to a certain kind of act or a defined performance. Instead of giving a kind of prescription and suggesting certain kinds of acts under the name of parodic repetition, in this argumentation, they claim that making boundaries of norms ambiguous by repeating them in an unusual, unexpected way is possible. Making the boundaries of norms ambiguous is clearly a never-ending process, just like the process of acquiring identity. Since it is always in the making, and so cannot be thought independent from this process, defining parodic repetition as a certain kind of act with a certain conclusion is not possible. In this sense, it seems that there is no desirable ideal to be achieved with the Butlerian term parodic repetition. Considering the way they formulate the web of norms together with its normative function, it seems that what is aimed at is

not an ideal but the process itself. Since, through this process, opening norms to questioning and opposition becomes possible:

> It is not possible to oppose the "normative" forms of gender without at the same time subscribing to a certain normative view of how the gendered world ought to be. I want to suggest, however, that the positive normative vision of this text, such as it is, does not and cannot take the form of a prescription: "subvert gender in the way that I say, and life will be good." (Butler, "Gender Trouble" xx, xxi)

By pointing out that such process is possible, "she makes good her promise that subjects can intervene meaningfully, politically, in the signification system which iteratively constitutes them. The political 'task' we face requires that we choose 'how to repeat' gender norms in such a way as to displace them" (Rothenberg and Valente 296).

Simply put, the point that Butler aims to make with the theory of performativity is that our incompleteness gives us space for self-creation. We have the freedom to change the identity that we have by choosing the way that we repeat norms. Ultimately, our gender identity can be rescued from the determination of the hegemonic norms since whether norms become hegemonic or not depends on the way we repeat them. In this sense, taking a position outside the web of norms is not a necessity to be able to deal with norms. That is to say, even though we cannot abandon norms completely, we can still deal with the gender norms by withdrawing the power that we give them with an alternative kind of repetition.

This kind of feminism, according to Linda Zerilli, "would strive to bring about transformation in normative conceptions of gender without returning to the classical notion of freedom as sovereignty" ("Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom" 180). In this regard, it seems that the rejection of the modern subject does not necessarily mean abandoning the values of Enlightenment. As we can see in the case of the notion of agency and freedom, these values can be recuperated by reconstructing their old versions with the theory of performativity.

On the other hand, this kind of feminism, according to Nussbaum, "is the virtually complete turning from the material side of life, toward a type of verbal and symbolic

politics that makes only the flimsiest of connections with the real situation of real women." She does not deny that "[c]ulture can shape and reshape some aspects of our bodily existence" with some male-dominated assumptions. However, for her, "it does not shape all the aspects of it" and feminism needs to consider all aspects of bodily existence. In order to exemplify her argument, she states,

> Women who run or play basketball, for example, were right to welcome the demolition of myths about women's athletic performance that were the product of male-dominated assumptions; but they were also right to demand the specialized research on women's bodies that has fostered a better understanding of women's training needs and women's injuries.

That is to say, the theory of performativity shows us that being against male-dominated assumptions; i.e., resisting gender norms is possible. However, for her, (considering this case) demanding a better understanding of women's training needs and women's injuries or, for example, demanding sex-based rights for the subjects of these assumptions does not seem possible without addressing "women's bodies". That is why, "the new feminism," according to Nussbaum, does not seem applicable to all the topics that feminism needs to address.

However, according to Butler, their argumentation does not necessarily lead us to the impossibility of such address. They argue that the term materiality needs to be deconstructed since the traditional meaning of this term is problematic and causes exclusions. That is, the purpose of the theory of performativity is to question traditional gender ontology and, in this way, destabilize the strict meaning assigned to gender in order to make rethinking it possible. For this reason, the deconstruction of the materiality of the bodies is not refusing it. For Butler,

> [T]he options for theory are not exhausted by presuming materiality, on the one hand, and negating materiality, on the other. It is my purpose to do precisely neither of these. To call a presupposition into question is not the same as doing away with it: rather, it is to free it up from its metaphysical lodgings in order to occupy and to serve very different political aims. To problematize the matter of bodies entails in the first instance a loss of epistemological certainty, but this loss of certainty does not necessarily entail political nihilism as its result. ("Feminist Contentions" 51)

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It seems clear that what Butler aims to do is to problematize "the traditional ontological referent of the term" and provide "the conditions to mobilize the signifier in the service of an alternative production" (*Ibid.* 51, 52).

In a similar manner, one may argue that introducing a category of woman and policy making around this category does not seem possible without a determined definition of the term "woman" that is not a product of repetition (and accordingly stable). However, according to Butler, claiming that there is no stable criterion does not mean that there cannot be a category. For them, the term "woman" still can be used without being strictly defined and the category "women" can be created without being exclusionary, as I will discuss in detail below.

CHAPTER 4

CATEGORY AND DIRECTIONALITY

Another reason why postmodern feminism is problematized is that it rejects any universal foundation to the category of woman. Before the shift to postmodernism, the category of woman had been based on a universal foundation and such foundation had been considered a necessity for political representation and collectivity. However, since there is no foundation that has universally representative power, such foundation causes the category to end up being discriminatory as argued before.

As an agonist, Butler constitutes their argument by focusing on individuals and their everyday acts. However, they are aware that the reason for embracing the universal category of woman by feminism was making women visible in the public sphere as political subjects. Even though, as a poststructuralist, they argue that no foundation has universally representative power since there is no a priori notion, they do not reject the need for a category and, accordingly, a foundation. Universal foundations, for Butler, are impossible, but foundations are necessary. That is why they introduce an alternative foundation to the feminist subject. They claim that the category of woman should be based on contingency but not universality in order to present a feminist subject and conduct feminist politics without disregarding different or new interpretations regarding womanhood. According to them, with *contingent foundations*, the feminist subject can be represented without mistakenly assuming that there are foundations that have universally representative power.

4.1. The Possibility of the Universal Representation of Women

It seems undeniable that, as Butler accepts, the category of woman is functional in the use for gaining visibility in the political sphere. However, since a description that is used for the category of woman unavoidably indicates a limited group, a debate on how the description should/should not be, and what characteristics need to be included in (or excluded from) the category, is inevitable. In other words, even though feminism needs a certain description to be able to point to a certain kind of group as its subject and to be able to speak for them, it also needs to face the inevitable debate on what the content of that description should be. Butler is aware of this need and says,

> Within feminism, it seems as if there is some political necessity to speak as and for women, and I would not contest that necessity. ... But this necessity needs to be reconciled with another. The minute that the category of women is invoked as describing the constituency for which feminism speaks, an internal debate invariably begins over what the descriptive content of that term will be. ("Feminist Contentions" 49)

That is to say, as much as feminism needs the category of women together with a certain description of women to be able to speak for women, it needs to give an account of the criteria for determining the content of this category. As long as the subject of the category of women is based on a universal, and so necessitates a certain description of what it is to be a 'woman', it is exclusionary for the people who cannot be included in that description. For example, as Butler states, when the category is characterized by maternity, it cannot fit all women since "all women are not mothers; some cannot be, some are too young or too old to be, some choose not to be, and for some who are mothers, that is not necessarily the rallying point of their politicization in feminism" (*Ibid.*). That is why, for Butler, feminist politics should not be identity-based; it should not be grounded in universal human nature. Even though the aim of creating the category of women is being able to gather women under a single roof, the effort of making the category universal can make the category deviate from its aim. Since whatever criteria are used for the category of women they will always point to a limited group, and such effort can cause factionalization in the feminist movement. Butler writes:

> I would argue that any effort to give universal or specific content to the category of women, presuming that that guarantee of solidarity is required in advance, will necessarily produce factionalization, and that "identity" as a point of departure can never hold as the solidifying ground of a feminist political movement. (*Ibid.* 50)

When we look at the history of feminism, we can see some examples that prove Butler's argument. Black feminists' objection, for example, was caused by being ignored/not being included in the feminist content. Since the universal representation of women necessitates the idea of universal human nature, it functions as a determination by imposing certain norms. It determines what the woman is; it defines women with certain characteristics and so subjects them to some assumptions:

> On the one hand, representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women. (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 3, 4)

For this reason, accepting the universal representation of women necessitates accepting what is assumed to be true about this category. Since such representation of women functions to justify some assumptions about women and womanhood, and thus causes factionalization, for Butler, the aim of increasing the visibility of women is not enough to accept such a category.

Moreover, as a particular description refers to particular characteristics, the category based on a particular description of human nature not only excludes people who do not have those characteristics by ignoring them but also makes people who are included in the category subject to some assumptions. For instance, characterizing the category of women in terms of maternity does not fit all women but also makes women subjected to the assumptions associated with the concept of maternity. In the world of business, for example, individuals who are assigned female sex at birth might not be preferred for employment because it is assumed that they are going to give birth to a child or give priority to their children. When feminism is considered as the movement against those assumptions about women, it seems it is possible to argue that creating such a category of women not only cannot be a solution, but, furthermore, can actually be an obstacle by further cultivating the tradition it tries to overcome. The category of

woman based on biological foundations, for example, is obviously not comprehensive enough; it excludes people such as intersex, trans, or anyone who has different anatomy than the idealized one in the heterosexual grid. Such a category is problematic not only because it is exclusionary but also because it necessitates accepting assumptions associated with sex. When having a female body, for example, is associated with being dominated, presenting the body as something natural implies that the domination itself is also natural. Even though such implication is not inevitable, as John Stuart Mill asks "was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it" (129)? In this sense, the argumentation of sex-gender discrimination causes a circularity and creates the risk of ending up accepting male-dominated assumptions. In other words, to deal with the assumptions based on gender, as stated before, feminists highlighted the distinction between sex and the assumptions socially imposed on sex by introducing the term gender. However, for Butler, as these assumptions are associated with sex, introducing the term gender and using it to deal with the assumptions is not reasonable. According to them, "if gender hierarchy produces and consolidates gender, and if gender hierarchy presupposes an operative notion of gender, then gender is what causes gender, and the formulation culminates in tautology" ("Gender Trouble" xii). That is to say, trying to deal with gender norms by making such a distinction is problematic not only because there is no notion – including sex – that is prediscursive/prior to the normative operation, but also because of the circularity and accordingly non-functionality of the term gender.

That is why Butler argues that we need to revolutionize the political structure instead of sticking to politics based on identity. Adopting a strictly defined identity category as a necessity for representation of the feminist subject, for them, "masks an implicit commitment to a certain kind of politics" (Nicholson, "Feminist Contentions" 4), which is based on assumptions associated with sex and imposes hegemonic norms. However, in order to exist in the political sphere and to be able to represent women i.e., conduct representational politics, feminism needs to formulate a category of its subject. Since the representation of women is problematic when it is characterized by

the categorization of woman based on a universal foundation, finding a way to assign an alternative foundation for the category and justify this representation is necessary.

4.2. Contingency as an Alternative Foundation for the Category of Women

According to Butler, the representation of women does not have to be universal. The claim of the impossibility of a universal representation does not eliminate the possibility of women's representation. On the contrary, the claim of the necessity of such representation and a stable subject causes a deadlock by preventing any possible opposition. In Butler's words:

> To claim that politics requires a stable subject is to claim that there can be no political opposition to that claim. Indeed, that claim implies that a critique of the subject cannot be a politically informed critique but, rather, an act which puts into jeopardy politics as such. … The act which unilaterally establishes the domain of the political functions, then, is an authoritarian ruse by which political contest over the status of the subject is summarily silenced. ("Feminist Contentions" 36)

For this reason, according to Butler, what feminism needs to do is not to present a universal category and accordingly a strictly defined subject in order to be visible in the political sphere, but rather to release the subject of feminism from this hegemonic understanding. That is to say, instead of assuming a universal representation as a necessity and trying to fit it into the way of conducting identity politics (which necessitates a strict definition of the subject and, therefore, is closed to any differentiation), what feminism needs is to oppose such assumption. In this way, the consequences it causes can be considered and questioned. For Butler,

> To refuse to assume, that is, to require a notion of the subject from the start is not the same as negating or dispensing with such a notion altogether; on the contrary, it is to ask after the process of its construction and the political meaning and consequentiality of taking the subject as a requirement or presupposition of theory. (*Ibid.*)

That is why opposing a stable subject, for Butler, does not eliminate the subject and make its representation impossible. On the contrary, the critique of the subject releases the subject from being strictly defined and makes it open to reinterpretations. According to them, "[t]he critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather, a way of interrogating its construction as a pregiven or foundationalist premise" (*Ibid.* 42). That is to say, by refusing the assumption of a stable subject, they aim not to erase the subject but to protect it from any restrictions. Butler writes:

> To deconstruct the subject of feminism is not, then, to censure its usage, but, on the contrary, to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from the maternal or racialist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear. (*Ibid.* 50)

It seems clear that since identity is constructed through exclusion, and cannot be self-representative, any category based on identity is necessarily exclusionary and there cannot be an identity-based category that has universally representative power. That is why Butler argues that seeking a universal representation means imposing a hegemonic understanding on the public. That is to say, any category that has the claim of being universally representative is necessarily formed by excluding the other. Since such a category gains and perpetuates its existence through being exclusionary, any intervention that comes from outside its domain is a threat to its hegemony. That is why any category taking universality as its foundation needs to be closed to any opposition or questioning.

Hence, according to Butler, feminism should take not universality, but contingency as a foundation. In their view,

> Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary. This is not to say that the term "women" ought not to be used, or that we ought to announce the death of the category. On the contrary, if feminism presupposes that "women" designates an undesignatable field of differences, one that cannot be totalized or summarized by a descriptive identity category, then the very term becomes a site of permanent openness and resignifiability. (*Ibid.*)

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That is to say, for Butler, the universal representation of women and, accordingly, the stable subject of feminism is not a necessity for the categorization of women. Without the idea of universal human nature, without pointing to a strictly defined subject, the term woman can still be used. While performativity provides a chance for opposition to the assumption that a sovereign subject is required for agency, politics with contingent foundations provides a chance for opposition to the assumption that a universally represented subject is required for representation. Since the emancipation of the subject comes from the ability to make norms ambiguous, the category of the subject needs to be based on ambiguous terms to be able to serve an emancipatory movement. The change of the foundation of the category to the contingent from the universal, for Butler, makes its subject open to differences and possible changes and, thus, makes it more comprehensive in this way. Since the way that the subject resists is by parodically repeating norms, and, in this way, by being able to reconstruct its identity, the identity category of such a subject needs to be open to different interpretations and performative reconstructions. That is why, according to Butler, what is needed is to deconstruct the subject of feminism by removing from it the claim of universality and by making it more open to different forms of womanhood. Butler writes,

> [F]oundations function as the unquestioned and the unquestionable within any theory. And yet, are these "foundations", that is, those premises that function as authorizing grounds, are they themselves not constituted through exclusions which, taken into account, expose the foundational premise as a contingent and contestable presumption? Even when we claim that there is some implied universal basis for a given foundation, that implication and that universality simply constituted a new dimension of unquestionability. (*Ibid.* 39, 40)

That is why, for Butler, politics of a universal representation is not appropriate. Rather politics should be based on representations with contingent foundations. They argue that even though we cannot abandon norms by taking a position outside of the web of norms, we can make the boundaries of norms ambiguous by repeating them with parodic repetition. In a similar vein, even though we cannot eliminate the necessity of a foundation by exiting the structure of representational politics, we can make the feminist subject open to new interpretations by basing the category of women on contingency. That is to say, representational feminist politics requires the ability "to

speak as and for women" (*Ibid.* 49). However, since identity is always in the making, an identity category that is always open to reinterpretations is needed. By taking contingency as the foundation of the category of woman, and so making its definition ambiguous, the feminist subject can be relieved of the necessity of being strictly defined.

Butler argues that the categorization of the feminist subject, and accordingly the representation of women, is possible without a strict definition of the term "woman." They aim to make the category open to resignification to prevent it from being exclusionary. However, since they do not introduce any criterion, the direction of these resignifications is unknown.

According to Nussbaum, Butler "tacitly assumes an audience of like-minded readers who agree (sort of) about what the bad things are […] and who even agree (sort of) about why they are bad," but, without this assumption, "the absence of a normative dimension becomes a severe problem". That is to say, since there is no determined direction of resignification, contingent foundations cannot guarantee that the category would serve feminist politics, or not be applied to and used for the wrong purposes.

Butler is aware of this possibility: "[t]hat the category is unconstrained, even that it comes to serve antifeminist purposes, will be part of the risk of this procedure" ("Feminist Contentions" 51). For Butler, such risk needs to be taken in order to conduct emancipatory politics since emancipation is possible only with emancipation from a strictly defined identity. In other words, as Fraser expresses, "[a]t the deepest level, she understands women's liberation as liberation from identity, since she views identity as inherently oppressive" (71). That is why Butler aims to eliminate the necessity of a certain definition of the term woman and takes the risk of problematic interpretations of the term. However, it is not clear why such elimination is the only way for an emancipatory movement. As Fraser interrogates, it is not clear why identifications and accordingly exclusions are necessarily bad:

> But is it really the case that no one can become the subject of speech without others' being silenced? Are there no counterexamples? Where such exclusions do exist, are they all bad? Are they all equally bad? Can we distinguish legitimate from illegitimate exclusions, better from worse

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practices of subjectivation? [...] Can we construct practices, institutions,
and forms of life in which the empowerment of some does not entail the
disempowerment of others? If not, what is the point of feminist struggle?
(*Ibid.* 68)

To illustrate this point (i.e., the necessity of being able to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate exclusions), we can examine the lawsuit brought forward by Canadian transgender activist Jessica Yaniv who sued multiple waxing salons for refusing to provide genital waxing services to her. She argued that she was exposed to gender discrimination and the aim of these repudiations was erasing transgender people in the social sphere by excluding them.

It is a fact that transgender people have been exposed to discrimination in various ways directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly, and, in this way, are excluded from several areas of society. Since they have been subjected to some phobic assumptions, they have been systematically discriminated. For instance, the reason that transgender people are often not preferred by several sectors as employees and so have limited job opportunities is they are often considered "unprofessional" and/or have been associated with sex work and entertainment businesses. By being subjected to such assumptions, transgender people have been marginalized and excluded from several areas of society. As a consequence of the systematically constructed marginalized image of transgender people, they have been targeted and victimized.

That is, as Yaniv argued, being deprived of receiving such service is a part of this systematic discrimination and of the bigger picture of how this social injustice works. For this reason, since being denied as a transgender woman to receive a service that is (supposed to be) provided to any woman is an example of such discrimination, these repudiations may serve transphobic purposes by excluding transgender people and correspondingly by being part of this social injustice. She states that "[t]o deny us these rights is denying our existence. This is important because it will show that refusing service to a person in a protected ground because they [the beauticians in this case] are part of that protected ground is discrimination" (Wakefield).

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However, the additional (and what makes this case problematic) factor is that the individuals sued by Yaniv were immigrant women who were also exposed to discrimination in several areas of society. They refused to provide service to Yaniv stating that according to their religion and/or culture, touching a male genital is not appropriate. Defending lawyer Jay Cameron argued that "[n]o woman should be compelled to touch male genitals against her will, irrespective of how the owner of the genitals identifies" (Larsen). However, according to Yaniv, "she was denied service because of her gender identity" (Mahdawi). She wrote on Twitter:

> This is not about waxing. This is about businesses and individuals using their religion and culture to refuse service to protected groups because - they- don't agree with it or the person and use that to illegally discriminate contrary to the BC Human Rights Code and the CHRC. (*Ibid.*)

The tribunal interpreted Yaniv's complaints as an attack on "South Asian and other immigrant or racialized women who would not serve her" (Little). While Yaniv argued that she is subject to discrimination because of her gender identity, the tribunal argued that the beauticians named in the case are exposed to discrimination because of their race, ethnicity, and class. As a response to this accusation, Yaniv said that "[y]es, I did publish 'racist remarks' because being denied services daily from the East Indian community at any business, sucks." She argued that not immigrants but trans people are the target and victims by stating that "[t]he immigrants are targeting trans people. We are the victims, not them" (Wakefield).

Even though Yaniv is right in the claim that this is not about waxing and that trans people are victims of gender discrimination, she is evidently wrong in the claim that immigrants are not victims. It is a fact that immigrants are victimized as well by being subjected to some phobic assumptions and marginalized. For instance, immigrants (especially those who migrated from underdeveloped countries) are assumed underqualified for various sectors to work. Accordingly, they have limited job opportunities, and, for this reason, most of the time, they are coerced into irregular jobs and trafficking. As a consequence of this, generally speaking, immigrants are perceived as potential criminals, and the places they live that are named mostly by their ethnicity are seen as dangerous places where illegal activities are committed.

Immigrant women (as compared to immigrant men) have a much more limited range of job opportunities and correspondingly occupy jobs within an informal sector. The beauticians in this lawsuit, for example, are also immigrant women who have small businesses and/or work from home. Referring to these women, Yaniv claims that "[n]o one forced them into those jobs. They knew the job they're getting into" (*Ibid.*). However, considering these women and the social conditions in which they find themselves, such claim seems clearly problematic. It is known that,

> The migration of women is mostly unrelated to career advancement and skill acquisition. There is enough evidence to suggest that a significant number of migrant women possess skills and qualifications often not recognised or unneeded in the types of work that they perform. In fact, many studies indicate that migration involves deskilling for some groups of women. For example many Filipino women with college degrees work in domestic service or the entertainment industry. (Kawar)

The lawsuit was dismissed since "[e]xpert testimony claimed that waxing male genitalia could pose a serious risk of injury if the provider has not received specific training" (Mitchell). That is, the court did not have to decide between two social injustices and to assign priority to one of these. However, if there were no expert testimony, the court decision would be about taking sides between gender discrimination and ethnicity discrimination. It is worth noting that just as it is fact that transgender women are often discriminated by being denied certain services that are offered to other women or men, it is also a fact that ethnic and religious minorities are often discriminated by being labelled as uncivilized members of inferior cultures and unenlightened religions. It is obvious that discrimination based on sex/gender is neither more nor less reproachable than discrimination based on ethnicity/religion. Keeping this in mind, let us assume that we are in the position of the tribunal. Assuming that no discrimination is less horrible than the other, and that there is no easy solution to such conflicts that intuitively force themselves on us, we would be needing clear criteria to avoid making "wrong" decisions. Otherwise, in either way, it would be discriminatory for a group of women. I think this case demonstrates that the category of woman with contingent foundations is problematic since it is insufficient when different identities fall afoul of each other and when a decision between "bad" resignifications and the "good" ones is needed.

It is important to point out that what makes portraying this case as problematic possible (by considering the conditions of both sides) is contingent foundations. That is, without taking contingency as the foundation of the category of women, neither the discrimination that Yaniv is exposed to nor the one that beauticians are exposed to would be visible. In other words, basing the category of women on contingent foundations and, in this way, being able to include "other" women in the category makes possible to call what these women were subjected to discrimination. It is clear that both sides of this case, both transgender women and immigrant women, are excluded and are deprived of some basic human rights by being labelled as the "other" and being marginalized. Considering feminism aims to address the problems of women who have been discriminated in differentiating and intersecting ways, elucidating these discriminations by considering different forms of womanhood, by considering "other" women, is crucial.

This is why, according to Butler, feminism ought to serve "as a basis for alliance" ("Undoing Gender" 9). Feminism, as a movement against "violence against women, sexual and nonsexual," can and should function as a basis for alliance between identities "since phobic violence against bodies is part of what joins antihomophobic, antiracist, feminist, trans, and intersex activism" (*Ibid.*).

For Butler, gender discrimination "no longer serves as the exclusive framework for understanding its contemporary usage." That is,

> Discrimination against women continues—especially poor women and women of color, if we consider the differential levels of poverty and literacy not only in the United States, but globally—so this dimension of gender discrimination remains crucial to acknowledge. But gender now also means gender identity, a particularly salient issue in the politics and theory of transgenderism and transsexuality. (*Ibid.* 6)

However, as Butler argues, the expanding meaning of gender discrimination should not cause disregarding the differential levels of discrimination that women suffer. They state,

> [J]ust as it no longer works to consider "gender discrimination" as a code for discrimination against women, it would be equally unacceptable to

> propound a view of gender discrimination that did not take into account the differential ways in which women suffer from poverty and illiteracy, from employment discrimination, from a gendered division of labor within a global frame, and from violence, sexual and otherwise. (*Ibid.* 8, 9)

In this sense, "[i]t is crucial to understand the workings of gender in global contexts, in transnational formations, not only to see what problems are posed for the term 'gender' but to combat false forms of universalism that service a tacit or explicit cultural imperialism" (*Ibid.* 9).

In a similar vein, according to Serene J. Khader, what feminism needs to do is act against cultural imperialism by eliminating "association of Western values with moral progress" (5). For her,

> Enlightenment liberalism seems in particular to animate the assumptions behind many popular media depictions and advocacy discourses, including, for example, the assumption that unregulated capitalism will benefit women and the assumption that traditional adherence is deeply at odds with feminism. Even Western feminist theorists who eschew such assumptions in the abstract fall into them when they are evaluating specific cases related to "other" women and making prescriptions for them. (*Ibid.* 4)

She argues that "feminisms based in traditionalist worldviews are possible, even ones based in worldviews that take some religious or traditional dictates to be beyond question." By eliminating imperialist understanding, "we can see that whether practices and beliefs contribute to oppression or not is a function of their content and effects—not their perceived origins" (*Ibid.* 9).

According to Khader, Western values serve to imperialist domination (especially in non-Western contexts) by "increase[ing] sexist oppression" and "women's vulnerability" (*Ibid.*). For this reason, she argues that

> The way forward can only be to articulate a normative position that criticizes gender injustice without prescribing imperialism. We need greater clarity about which values feminists should embrace when engaged in transnational praxis, and we need to be able to explain why these values do not license projects of Western and Northern domination often undertaken in their name. (*Ibid.* 2)

For her, "feminism's true normative core [is] opposition to sexist oppression". However, it is often mistakenly assumed that "feminism is just improving women's well-being within an oppressive system, or that feminist change will occur if women have the ability to reject the trappings of their religions or cultures or to earn incomes" (*Ibid.* 5).

Considering that "[o]ppression is a set of social conditions that systematically disadvantages members of one social group relative to another (see Frye 1983; Young 1990)" (*Ibid.*), and that feminism aims opposition to sexist oppression (not simply improved conditions in an oppressive system), what feminism needs to construct is practices and institutions in which someone's empowerment does not mean another's disempowerment.

Butler aims to make an emancipatory movement possible by opening the identity to reconstruction and the category of woman to resignification. However, as it can be seen in this particular case, such openness does not seem sufficient by itself for the movement since it does not guarantee that the movement will be emancipatory when there is no determined direction of resignification. Yaniv, for instance, reconstructs her identity by resisting gender norms and resignifies the category of woman by reinterpreting it. However, her act is clearly not emancipatory for the beauticians in this particular case. I think this case also demonstrates the possibility that the categorization of the feminist subject can be applied wrongly, and even used for malicious purposes. While some used this case as a way to stoke hatred against trans women, some used it as a way of whipping up hate against immigrant women (Mahdawi). But what is the criteria that may help us separate legitimate claims or activisms from the illegitimate ones?

According to Drucilla Cornell, in order to make "legally addressable claims," "[w]e need to be able to explain why [a] behavior is wrong and why our concept of right is what makes it wrong" ("Feminist Contentions" 80). In a similar vein, Benhabib argues that what is needed for emancipation is "to separate out that which feminists ought to reject from that which we need to retain" (Nicholson, "Feminist Contentions" 2). That is why Benhabib argues that we need "a regulative principle" (21) to be able to

determine such separation and, correspondingly, to be able to conduct emancipatory politics. That is to say, "Benhabib looks for the philosophical prerequisites to emancipatory politics" (Nicholson, "Feminist Contentions" 6). Butler, on the other hand, argues that what is needed for emancipation is to question "the political effects of claims which assert such prerequisites" (*Ibid.*).

For Butler, as stated before, the category "would have to be left permanently open, permanently contested, permanently contingent, in order not to foreclose in advance future claims for inclusion" ("Feminist Contentions" 41). However, such openness makes the direction of resistance and change indeterminate. As seen in the example of Yaniv, as much as such a category is open to reinterpretations, it is open to misusage since its direction is unknown. That is to say, with such a category, for Butler, the feminist movement and related changes are possible. However, since the direction of resignification is indeterminate and since the process is never-ending and unconstrained, its results are unpredictable. In this sense, Yaniv's act does not contradict Butler's argumentation in principle since there is no direction, i.e., no separation between positive and negative resignifications.

According to Nancy Fraser, "[s]ince Butler's term [i.e., resignification] carries no implication of validity or warrant, its positive connotations are puzzling" (67, 68). Butler does not answer the questions "[w]hy is resignification good" or "[c]an't there be bad (oppressive, reactionary) resignifications" (*Ibid.* 68). Considering Butler's aim is to describe the way in which the oppressive norms are subverted, and to open the category of the feminist subject to "a possible future in which harmful norms lose their legitimacy" (İbrahimhakkıoğlu 134), it is clear that resignification, for Butler, has positive connotations. However, "her lack of emphasis on a positive conception of normativity … deprives her account of the possibility of efficiently distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' resignification and likewise 'good' and 'bad' norms" (*Ibid.*, p. 135). That is, the lack of normativity in Butler's argumentation creates an obstacle to distinguishing positive and negative resignifications and correspondingly to the justification of the direction of the feminist movement.

Considering their later works, it seems that Butler is aware of this problem i.e., the risk of losing the direction of feminist movement without normative judgments. Accordingly, they gesture towards a sense of normativity in *Precarious Life* and *Giving an Account of Oneself*. In the next chapter, I will depict how the need to make normative judgments haunts the late Butler.

CHAPTER 5

INTERDEPENDENCY AND RESPONSIBILITY

It seems that the problem addressed in the previous chapter, not being able to distinguish good resignifications from bad resignifications, is caused by a lack of normativity in Butler's argumentation.

In their early works, Butler provides a deconstructive critique of the feminist subject since they aim to emancipate the subject from being determined by hegemonic norms. They do not provide any prescription or make normative claims since they aim to avoid normalization and oppression. However, as Fraser argues, "[f]eminists need both deconstruction and reconstruction" (71). That is, "destabilization of meaning" is necessary in order to argue against oppressive normative judgments. However, at the same time, reconstruction (i.e., normative judgments) is necessary in order to "offer emancipatory alternatives" and "projection of utopian hope" (*Ibid.*). In other words, as Benhabib argues, "[p]ostmodernism can teach us the theoretical and political traps of why utopias and foundational thinking can go wrong, but it should not lead to a retreat from utopia altogether" (30). In this sense, since "[w]e are not for 'anything goes'" (Fraser 71), theorizing feminist politics only through deconstructive critique has been found problematic.

Considering Butler's aim is to describe the way in which "oppressive" norms may be subverted, it seems that Butler is not for "anything goes," as well. However, because of the lack of normativity in their argumentation, their critique of the feminist subject has been criticized as being "far too one-sided to meet the full needs of a liberatory politics" (*Ibid.*).

Taking account of this problem, in their later works, Butler gestures towards a sense of normativity. By reconceptualizing some conceptions of the self, they provide a perspective regarding our relations to others and the conditions of life.

In *Precarious Life*, for example, Butler starts their argumentation "with the question of human". This is "not because there is a human condition that is universally shared," but because, according to them, there is a notion that all of us have namely, vulnerability (20). Specifically, Butler states that,

> Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a "we," for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous "we" of us all (*Ibid.*).

While, traditionally, vulnerability "has been associated with weakness, as being prone to injury and harm, or open to attack," Butler reconceptualizes it "as a constitutive openness to the other" (Petherbridge 590). That is, for Butler, vulnerability is a notion that we share. Since we are all vulnerable, we are dependent on each other.

Such dependency, for Butler, is inevitable. They state "there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away" ("Precarious Life" xii). That is, "[t]his condition of vulnerability and mutual interdependence is not one with which we can argue; it is an ontological truism for any embodied being" (Murphy 71).

While Butler "confess[es] to not knowing how to theorize that interdependency," they are clear about why introducing the terms vulnerability and loss, to find an alternative basis for ethics and politics:

> I would suggest, however, that both our political and ethical responsibilities are rooted in the recognition that radical forms of self-sufficiency and unbridled sovereignty are, by definition, disrupted by the larger global processes of which they are a part, that no final control can be secured, and that final control is not, cannot be, an ultimate value. ("Precarious Life" xiii)

Butler argues that our experience of vulnerability, loss and grief allows us to extrapolate from our own vulnerability to the vulnerability of others. In this sense,

vulnerability "provides the basis upon which one lives beyond or outside of oneself."
They state:

> I am referring to violence, vulnerability, and mourning, but there is a more
> general conception of the human with which I am trying to work here, one
> in which we are, from the start, given over to the other, one in which we
> are, from the start, even prior to individuation itself and, by virtue of bodily
> requirements, given over to some set of primary others. (*Ibid.* 31)

By providing such basis, i.e., by introducing corporeal vulnerability as a concept prior to individualization and a common characteristic of us all, Butler "suggests a kind of empathetic relation to the other" (Petherbridge 593). That is, in the reality of one's vulnerability and accordingly the realization of the vulnerability of others, "there is some ethical merit" (Murphy 71).

For Butler, our interdependency with each other is the condition of our responsibility to each other. By rethinking vulnerability as an ethical category (that is based on our primary interdependence and intercorporeality), Butler challenges "liberal conceptions of the sovereign and individualistic subject as the basis of ethics or politics" (Petherbridge 590).

> Instead of the primacy that autonomy and independence have been
> afforded in traditional elaborations of ethics, Butler argues that it is an
> inevitable interdependency, a primary vulnerability, that might instead be
> acknowledged as the basis for global political community. (Murphy 71)

This is because Butler is suspicious of the traditional understanding of autonomy. For them, understanding the subject and its actions apart from its social conditions is problematic, considering that it presupposes that "the individual might take on responsibility only by virtue of independence from the social and its affective relations" (Jenkins 115). For Butler, dependency on social conditions is not an obstacle, on the contrary, it is the condition of agency and responsibility.

In this way, i.e., by reconceptualizing vulnerability and rethinking it as an ethical category, Butler also challenges the idea that vulnerability is something associated with particular identities or groups and accordingly the political strategies that are based on such idea. They argue that resorting to violence by ignoring the fact that we are all vulnerable and dependent on each other is caused by the fear of being passive

and powerless, and such ignorance brings with the ignorance of our responsibility to each other. They rhetorically ask:

> Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence? Is there something to be gained in the political domain by maintaining grief as part of the framework within which we think our international ties? If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? ("Precarious Life" 30)

In this work, Butler invites us "to rethink the relation between conditions and acts." According to them, "[o]ur acts are not self-generated, but conditioned. We are at once acted upon and acting, and our 'responsibility' lies in the juncture between the two" (*Ibid.* 16).

Similarly, in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler argues that inevitable exposure to others, i.e., interdependency, constitutes responsibility. According to them, the self cannot be self-present since it is relational, i.e., it cannot be thought apart from the normative structures beyond its control. They state:

> Yet there is no "I" that can fully stand apart from the social conditions of its emergence, no "I" that is not implicated in a set of conditioning moral norms, which, being norms, have a social character that exceeds a purely personal or idiosyncratic meaning. (7)

That is why "when the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, [what is needed is] an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence." In this sense, "[t]he "I" is always to some extent dispossessed by the social conditions of its emergence" (*Ibid.* 8). However, this does not mean that there is no "subjective ground" for ethics. On the contrary, for Butler, being conditioned by normative structures is the condition of "moral inquiry." It is "the condition under which morality itself emerges." Butler elaborates on this point in the following way:

> If the "I" is not at one with moral norms, this means only that the subject must deliberate upon these norms, and that part of deliberation will entail a critical understanding of their social genesis and meaning. In this sense, ethical deliberation is bound up with the operation of critique. And critique finds that it cannot go forward without a consideration of how the

deliberating subject comes into being and how a deliberating subject might actually live or appropriate a set of norms. (*Ibid.*)

That is to say, subjects are created through moral norms and conditioned by them. Thus, one cannot give a full account of oneself without giving an account of these norms. However, this does not mean that deliberation is not possible. Subjects, according to Butler, must negotiate these norms reflectively.

> One cannot will away this paradoxical condition for moral deliberation and for the task of giving an account of oneself. Even if morality supplies a set of norms that produce a subject in his or her intelligibility, it also remains a set of norms and rules that a subject must negotiate in a living and reflective way. (*Ibid.* 10)

As it is not fully determined, the self, for Butler, is also not fully free. It is, as argued before, what makes moral inquiry possible. That is, "paradoxically," the subject's unfreedom, i.e., its dependency on conditions beyond its control, is the condition of its freedom i.e., its ability to negotiate.

> This ethical agency is neither fully determined nor radically free. Its struggle or primary dilemma is to be produced by a world, even as one must produce oneself in some way. This struggle with the unchosen conditions of one's life, a struggle—an agency—is also made possible, paradoxically, by the persistence of this primary condition of unfreedom. (*Ibid.* 19)

By "social conditions of the self's emergence," Butler also refers to the need of addressing to others. For them, the self emerges only through an address to others. That is since the self is relational and cannot be self-present, the self becomes accountable for us and others only through addressing others, i.e., recognition. However, since recognition cannot come from a pure subject position and is always in relation to exterior normative structures, the self cannot completely give an account of oneself i.e., a full narration is not possible.

> Although we are compelled to give an account of our various selves, the structural conditions of that account will turn out to make a full such giving impossible. The singular body to which a narrative refers cannot be captured by a full narration […] Moreover, the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and substitutability within which our "singular" stories are told. (*Ibid.* 20, 21)

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For this reason, according to Butler, we are "opaque" to ourselves. Since any account of oneself is necessarily in relation to the recognition of the other selves that also are conditioned and limited by the conditions they emerge from, this opacity constitutes the base of our relation to others. That is, this opacity, paradoxically, creates who we are by creating the limits of the self.

> To know the limits of acknowledgment is to know this fact in a limited way; as a result, is to experience the very limits of knowing. This can, by the way, constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike: I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others, who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves. (*Ibid.* 42)

This opacity creates the need for recognition, i.e., the necessity of addressing another. Accordingly, exposure to others is unavoidable. This unavoidable exposure to others, this opacity, for Butler, is the condition of our responsibility, i.e., it constitutes an obligation to others. They explain,

> Indeed, responsibility is not a matter of cultivating a will, but of making use of an unwilled susceptibility as a resource for becoming responsive to the Other. Whatever the Other has done, the Other still makes an ethical demand upon me, has a "face" to which I am obligated to respond— meaning that I am, as it were, precluded from revenge by virtue of a relation I never chose. (*Ibid.* 91)

In both works, in *Precarious Life* and in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler rethinks some basic conceptions of the self and reconceptualizes them. By reconceptualizing the self as something relational to others and introducing this interdependency as a basis for ethics, they provide a different perspective than the traditional one.

It is clear that what Butler does in these later works is providing a basis upon which one lives beyond or outside of oneself and imagining the possibility of a community on such basis. In this way, they oppose rooting our political and ethical responsibilities in self-sufficiency and sovereignty. However, it is not clear why Butler does not take into consideration the possibility that our vulnerability could be the basis also for violence.

According to Ann V. Murphy, vulnerability is an important concept considering the basis it provides for the understanding of our interdependency. However, she argues

that there is nothing "intrinsic" in the concept of vulnerability that could provide the basis for a prescriptive ethics. Because of this reason, because "vulnerability and aggression often emerge in precarious tandem" (Murphy 72), "beginning with a notion of vulnerability cannot guarantee what kinds of responses might follow; it neither precludes violence as a response nor presumes an ethical one" (Petherbridge 590).

In a similar vein, Elaine P. Miller is suspicious of the ethical category based on vulnerability. She argues that "as the other of violence, vulnerability may itself constitute or be constituted by violence in a way that puts its appeal into question" (102).

That is, even though providing such basis is efficient to oppose traditional and problematic ontologies of ethics and politics, it has been criticized for being insufficient to guarantee an alternative since it is not prescriptive. In other words, introducing an ethical category that is based on interdependency may be necessary to point out our responsibility to each other and to criticize unjust political strategies. However, without a prescription of this interdependency i.e., without normative judgments, there is no guarantee that politics conducted through this basis would be just or this interdependency provides ethical solutions since, as Murphy argues, "there is nothing prescriptive—or necessarily normative—in the acknowledgment that we are dispossessed and vulnerable before others" (73).

For instance, when we reconsider the case of Yaniv with the claim that we are obligated to respond to the other, the case still seems problematic. To be more specific, while the beauticians (who are immigrant women and exposed to discrimination due to their racial and religious identity) need social conditions which guarantee that they can freely live according to their religion and culture, Yaniv (who is a transgender woman and exposed to discrimination due to her gender identity) needs social conditions which guarantee that she can freely live according to her gender identity. However, the fact that both sides of this conflict are vulnerable does not promise a solution for this conflict. That is, it is still unclear how we can respond to the needs of both sides. When we respond to Yaniv's need, the beauticians are obligated to act

against their religion or culture. On the other hand, when we respond to the aestheticians' need, Yaniv is obligated to act against her gender identity.

That is to say, Butler's argumentation of responsibility does not provide a solution for the cases where different identities fall afoul of each other, and where a decision is needed. It seems clear that such decisions need to be judged individually or case by case but, at the same time, necessitate a shared perception of injustice and accordingly normativity. However, even though Butler aims to provide a ground for ethics and a just politics by conceptualizing precariousness as a shared condition of humans, there is no guarantee that such ground would be sufficient since "[i]n the absence of normative claims there is no clear extrapolation from the reality of embodied vulnerability to a just politics" (Murphy 73).

Similarly, according to Danielle Petherbridge, vulnerability is not only "an ethical or ontological question" but also "a political one," and for this reason, "shift[ing] arguments about its abuse and entanglement with power and violence to the public political sphere" is necessary (599, 589). She argues that even though Butler provides "insights regarding the complexity of the human condition," their theory does not offer much about "how the notion of vulnerability can operate as the basis for critiquing objectionable forms of vulnerability" (602, 589). According to Petherbridge, "the task of critique does require an account of the interrelation between vulnerability, recognition, and power," however, what Butler does is "reducing the analysis to a one-dimensional account of either violence or domination" (601, 602). That is, for Petherbridge, "a more robust account of normativity" is required for introducing vulnerability as a critical category (602).

Taking these critics into consideration, Butler's normative claims do not seem sufficient in order to avoid the risk of losing direction of the feminist movement. Since their argumentation is not prescriptive and the concept of interdependence is not prescriptive by itself, their argumentation does not necessarily lead us in a specific direction.

That is, Butler argues that our vulnerability or interdependency provides a ground for responsibility. However, claiming that we are obligated to respond to others cannot guarantee that these responses will be ethical or just. In this sense, Butler's sense of normativity seems insufficient to justify the direction of the feminist movement and to guarantee its retention.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

According to the poststructuralist understanding of power, since power is the producer of anything in the grid we live in, and since there is no position prior to, or independent of, the normative operations of power, neither the identity nor the category of the subject can be formulated independently of social and cultural norms. Correspondingly, there cannot be an identity category that is universally representative. Since identity is constructed through exclusion, identity categories are always exclusionary.

That is why Butler criticizes identity-based feminist politics by problematizing the identity category it produces. For them, neither the identity nor the category of the feminist subject should be closed to different, unhegemonic, and unpredictable resignifications. They argue that formulating the identity and the category of the subject in this way prevents any opposition and results in domination. By reformulating the identity and the category of the feminist subject, they aim to prevent feminist politics from being closed to different kinds of political actions.

In the first section of this study, we saw how the subject of feminism, namely "woman," has evolved with the intention of attaining a more comprehensive categorization and how every attempt to come up with a sufficiently comprehensive categorization has failed.

The categories presented by the first two waves of feminism were found problematic by the third wave because of the former's essentialist approach. The third wave's

constructionist approach, on the other hand, rejects any universal foundation, arguing that there is no foundation prior to the construction of the subject. The effort to assign such foundation, for the feminists of the third wave, causes discrimination and domination and is based on a simplified understanding of power.

With the shift to constructivism in the third wave, i.e., with the rejection of any universal foundation for the feminist subject, feminists diverged according to their approach to the concept of woman. Simply, while difference feminism and diversity feminism introduce a concept of woman, deconstruction feminism rejects the concept of woman, arguing that there is no (and cannot be any) concept prior to its social construction.

By associating with these approaches, feminists take two different political stances: associational and agonistic. While associationalists consider elucidating the subject's construction and the conditions of exclusion as a way for an emancipatory movement, agonists consider deconstructing the traditional referent of the terms (including "woman") as a necessity to unveil how the subject is both produced and oppressed.

In the second section, Butler's theory of performativity has been presented as an opposition to the assumption that a sovereign subject is required for freedom, agency, and resistance to power. By presenting a performative perspective on the feminist subject, i.e., by defining the identity-gaining process as something performative, Butler assigns agency to the subject. With "parodic repetition," they argue that hegemonic norms look natural as a result of constant repetition and so resisting them is possible by repeating them subversively and by making their boundaries ambiguous. In this way, they present a way for the feminist subject to resist norms without being defined and/or staying outside of these norms.

That is, with the theory of performativity, Butler argues that identity is open to reconstruction, and with the term parodic repetition, they aim to show that resisting oppressive norms is possible.

In the third section, Butler's term "contingent foundations" has been presented as a midway point of modern and postmodern formulations of the feminist subject. We saw

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that Butler avoids both the problematic formulation of the foundationalist approach that causes discrimination and the danger of anti-foundationalism that restrains collectivity by taking not universality but contingency as a foundation for the feminist subject. In this way, they present a category for the feminist subject that is open to different interpretations.

While performativity provides a chance for opposition to the assumption that a sovereign subject is required for agency, politics with contingent foundations provides a chance for opposition to the assumption that a universally represented subject is required for representation. With contingent foundations, they allow for the category to be open to reinterpretation by making the definition of woman ambiguous. While parodic repetition makes the possibility of struggling with norms maintainable without taking a position outside of power, contingent foundations make conducting representational politics possible without the claim of universality.

However, since such a category is unconstrained, it does not guarantee that it will retain feminist purposes or reject the anti-feminist ones. I have argued that in order to avoid losing the direction of feminist movement, we need to be able to distinguish between what we need to retain and what we need to reject in sex and gender-related discussions and disagreements. However, considering its lack of normativity, such distinction does not seem possible in Butler's argumentation.

That is to say, by claiming that resistance is possible with parodic repetition, and that representation is possible with contingent foundations, Butler aims to show that the rejection of a priori notions does not preclude the possibility of an emancipatory political movement. However, an emancipatory movement necessitates not only resistance and collectivity but also direction. Butler claims that resistance (with parodic repetition) and collectivity (with contingent foundations) are possible. However, since this resistance has no principle and this category has no criterion, the direction of the movement is indeterminate. In this sense, Butler recuperates the concept of agency and the concept of freedom with the theory of performativity, but their approach to the concept of justice still seems open to debate regarding the lack of normativity in their argumentation.

In the last section, Butler's later works were included in order to show that they gesture toward a sense of normativity. I have argued that the lack of normativity in their argumentation in their early works is the reason that the acts of resistance and therefore the direction of the change are indeterminate since there is no clear difference between positive and negative change. In their later works, they make normativity claims in terms of social interdependency. However, such differentiation (between positive and negative change) still does not seem possible. That is, in their later works, Butler introduces an ethical category that is based on interdependency and, in this way, points out our responsibility to each other and criticizes unjust political strategies. However, without stronger normative judgments, there is no guarantee that politics conducted through this basis would be just or this interdependency would provide ethical solutions. In other words, Butler claims that we are obligated to respond to each other. However, without a clear distinction between good and bad or positive and negative ways of responding, the aim of such obligation and the direction of these responses are doomed to stay indeterminate.

There is no doubt that opening the identity of the feminist subject to reconstruction and its category to reinterpretation is necessary in order to make feminism open to future possibilities. However, it seems that they are not enough by themselves considering the risk of losing the directionality of the movement.

Even though reconciliation between reconstructive critique (that necessitates normative judgments) and deconstructive critique (that aims to avoid such judgments) seems not easy to produce, considering that they seem to exclude each other at the first glance, it seems necessary considering that both of them provide us with important tools. That is, I think deconstruction provides us with a tool that we need and cannot discard in order to act against oppression and domination. However, theorizing it with normative judgments, and in this way, going beyond this tool, is also necessary in order to retain the idea of utopia.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

20. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında, belirli sosyal grupların maruz kaldığı adaletsizliklere karşı mücadele etmeyi amaçlayan siyasi hareketler ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu hareketler, geleneksel siyasi partiler yerine toplumsal gruplara veya kimlik gruplarına dayalı siyasi bir duruş sergileyerek bu gruplara yönelik ayrımcılığa karşı harekete geçmeyi ve onları sosyo-politik alanda daha görünür kılmayı amaçlamışlardır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda bazı siyaset teorileri, insan doğasına yönelik belirli bir tanıma dayalı bir temsil fikri geliştirmektedir. Kimlik temelli siyaset, ayrımcılığa ve adaletsizliğe karşı belirli bir grubu temsil etmeyi amaçladığından, öznesine işaret edebilmek adına belirli kriterler tanımlamaya gerek duyar. Ancak bunun kategorileştirmeyi, tanımlamayı ve buna bağlı olarak da farklılaştırmayı gerektirdiği yadsınamaz. Bu nedenle, kimlik temelli siyasal hareketlerin amacı kimliğin ayrıcalıklı olmayan yönlerine odaklanmak ve bu yolla, ötekileştirilmiş gruplar için adalet talep etmek olsa da bu grupları belirli kriterlerle ortaya koyma gerekliliği, kimliğin farklı yönlerinin ele alınmasını engellemektedir.

Benzer şekilde, kadınları birer politik özne olarak sunabilmek için kadın kategorisi gerekli görülmektedir. Ancak, her kategorileştirme gibi "kadın"ı kategorileştirmek de dışlayıcıdır; çünkü bu kategori evrensel bir kadın doğası tanımı gerektirir ve bu nedenle yalnızca belirli kriterlere uyan kadınları içerir. Örneğin, feminizmin öznesi doğumda kadın cinsiyeti atanan kişiler olarak tanımlandığında trans kadınlar bu tür bir öznellik formülasyonunun ve dolayısıyla feminist özne kategorisinin dışında kalacaktır. Yani, belirli bir insan grubunu tanımlayıp kim ya da ne olduklarını söylediğimiz sürece, onların kim ya da ne olmadığını da söylemiş oluruz. Bu sebeple, bir tanım yapmak doğası gereği dışlayıcıdır. Dolayısıyla, feminizm, kadınları

tanımlamak ve bu yolla politik sahada onlardan bahsedebilmek için "kadın" olmanın ne demek olduğunu sunmakla yükümlü görünse de dışlayıcı ve varsayımlardan bağımsız bir tanım olamayacağı için yeterince kapsayıcı bir kimlik kategorisi ortaya koyamaz.

Feminizmin tarihini incelediğimizde, öznesinin nasıl daha kapsamlı bir kategorizasyona ulaşma amacıyla evrildiği ve yeterince kapsamlı bir kategorizasyona ulaşmaya yönelik her girişimin başarısız olduğu görülebilir. Evrensel bir kategorinin imkansızlığı feminizmde kadın/kadınlık tanımına ilişkin bir iç tartışmaya neden olur. Kadın kategorisi için kullanılacak herhangi bir tanım zorunlu olarak sınırlı bir gruba işaret ettiği için bu tanımın nasıl olması/olmaması gerektiği ve hangi özelliklerin bu tanıma dahil edilmesi veya bu tanımdan çıkarılması gerektiği konusunda bir tür anlaşmazlık kaçınılmazdır.

Feminist kuram yalnızca bir siyaset kuramı değil aynı zamanda bir siyasi hareket de oluşturmayı amaçladığı için siyasetin mevcut koşullarını bertaraf etmesi pek olası görünmemektedir. Dolayısıyla, feminist politika, kadın olarak ve kadın adına konuşmayı gerektirdiği için ve bu tür bir politikayı yürütmek kimlik politikasına başvurmadan neredeyse imkansız olduğu için feminizmin öznelerini temsil edebilmek adına bir kimlik kategorisi sunması gerekir. Ancak, öznesi için gerekli kıldığı bazı kriterler nedeniyle böyle bir kategori için yeterince kapsamlı bir tanım yapmak mümkün değildir. Bu anlamda, feminist teorinin uğraşması gereken en zorlu konulardan biri, öznesinin, yani "kadın"ın ölçütlerini açıklamak gibi görünmektedir. "Kadın"ı kavramsallaştırmada kullanılan ölçütler ve bu kategoriye atfedilen temel, sıklıkla sorunsallaştırılır ve bunlar feminist kuramdaki güncel tartışmaların nedenlerindendir. En genel anlamda, feminist özne ve onun temsili sorununa yönelik yaklaşımların tarihsel olarak farklı "kadın" formülasyonlarına dayandığı ve kimliğin nasıl anlaşıldığına göre çeşitlendiği görülmektedir.

Kadınların ataerkil sistemin onları tanımlama biçiminden kaynaklanan baskıların öznesi olduğu düşünüldüğünde, kadın tanımı konusunda fikir birliğine varmak ilk bakışta gerekli görünmektedir. Ancak böyle bir görüş birliği olup olmadığı sorusuna paralel olarak bir tanım yapmanın mümkün olup olmadığı sorusu gündeme gelmiştir.

Kadının/kadınlığın ataerkil tanımına karşı çıkmak için feministler tarafından iki farklı duruş sergilenmektedir: ya feministlerin kadını tanımlama ve değerlendirme konusunda münhasır haklara sahip olduğu iddia edilmektedir ya da kadını tanımlayabilme olasılığı reddedilmektedir.

Genel anlamda, feminizmin ilk iki dalgasında ya da postmodernizm öncesi diyebileceğimiz dönemde, feministler birinci pozisyonu benimsemiş ve bir kadın tanımı sunmuşlardır. Ancak postmodernizme geçişle birlikte böyle bir tanımın mümkün olup olmadığı sorgulanmaya başlanmıştır.

Geleneksel ya da postmodernizm öncesi feminizm, yalnızca iktidardan bağımsız olan bir öznenin iktidara direnebileceğini ve dolayısıyla özerk olabileceğini varsaydığından, öznenin egemenliğinin özerklik için gerekli olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Ayrıca, evrensel bir feminist özne kategorisinin öznenin temsil edilebilmesi ve kolektivite oluşturulabilmesi için gerekli olduğunu varsaymaktadır. Ancak postmodernizme geçişle birlikte modern feminism, varsaydığı feminist öznenin kimliği ve kategorisi nedeniyle sorunsallaştırılmıştır. Postmodernist yaklaşıma göre, özne aşkınsal, yani kimliğinin inşa edildiği toplumsal ve kültürel koşullardan bağımsız düşünülemez. Dolayısıyla, özne kategorisi için evrensel bir temel bulunmamaktadır.

Postmodernizme geçişle birlikte "kadın" kategorisine evrensel bir temel tanımlama çabası büyük ölçüde sona ermiştir. Fakat bunun yerine, böyle bir temelin olasılığı sorgulanmaya başlanmış ve bu, feminist teoride bir kimlik krizine yol açmıştır. Postmodern özne anlayışını benimseyen feministler, kadın kategorisi için her türlü temeli reddetmiş ve feminist özneyi toplumsal olarak oluşturulmuş bir şey olarak takdim etmişlerdir.

Ancak, evrensel bir temel iddiasının sorunsallaştırılmasına benzer bir şekilde, feminist özne için herhangi bir temelin reddedilmesi de sorunsallaştırılmış ve tartışmalara neden olmuştur. Postmodern yaklaşımın evrensel bir kadın kategorisini imkansız kılarak herhangi bir feminist hareket olasılığını tehlikeye atabileceği düşünüldüğünde, bu yaklaşım feminizmin kendisine bir saldırı olarak algılanabilmektedir. Bu nedenle, temelcilik karşıtlığına bazı feminist teorisyenler tarafından karşı çıkılmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, feminist özne sorununa dair devam eden bu tartışmayı yorumlamak için modern feminizmden postmodern feminizme geçişe odaklanılarak feminizmin öznesinin tarihsel dönüşümü analiz edilmektedir. Ancak ne postmodernizm ne de feminizm her zaman net bir şekilde tanımlanabilir. Bu nedenle postmodernizm teriminin çeşitli kullanımları ve feminizme farklı yaklaşımlar vardır. *Postmodern Durum*'da, Jean-François Lyotard postmodernizm terimini temelciliğin bir eleştirisini belirtmek için kullanır. Bu çalışmada, postmodernizmin kendilerini postmodernistler olarak tanımlayanların bile üzerinde hemfikir olmadığı oldukça tartışmalı bir terim olduğu gerçeği göz ardı edilerek, Lyotard'ın geleneği izlenmekte ve terim öznenin modern, yani evrenselci ve temelci formülasyonunun reddine işaret etmek için kullanılmaktadır.

Bu çalışmanın amacı Judith Butler'ın feminist özne eleştirisini analiz etmek ve bir özgürleşme hareketi için araç olarak sunduğu alternatiflerin güvenilirliğini sorgulamaktır. Butler, modernizmi reddederek, ancak postmodernizmin sorunlarını sürdürmeden feminist özneyi yeniden formüle etmeyi amaçlar. Butler, parodik tekrar (*parodic repetition*) terimiyle özerklik için egemen bir öznenin gerekliliğine, olumsal temeller (*contingent foundations*) terimiyle ise kolektivite için evrenselliğin gerekliliğine karşı çıkar. Bu şekilde Butler, toplumsal inşasından bağımsız, yani aşkınsal bir özne anlayışının reddedilmesinin özgürleştirici bir siyasi hareket olasılığının engellenmesi anlamına gelmediğini savunur. Bu anlamda, Butler'ın teorisi feminist özne sorununa ilişkin sürmekte olan tartışmaya bir çözüm vadeder. Bununla birlikte bu çalışmada, bu teorinin sorunlu yanları olduğu iddia edilmektedir; çünkü bu teori direniş ve değişim için alternatif yollar sunsa da bu değişimin yönü belirsizdir.

Bu çalışmanın ilk bölümünde feminist özne sorununa ve bu soruna yönelik farklı feminist yaklaşımlara değinilmektedir. Öncelikle feminizmin üç dalgasından kısaca bahsedilmektedir. Birinci dalganın ve ikinci dalganın sunduğu kategoriler özcü yaklaşımları nedeniyle ayrımcı bulunurken, üçüncü dalganın inşacı yaklaşımı önceki dalgaların eksikliklerine "sorunlu" bir yanıt olarak sunulmaktadır. Ardından, feminist özneyi nasıl inşa ettiklerine veya inşa edip etmediklerine göre farklılaşan üç baskın postmodern yaklaşım tanıtılmaktadır. Spesifik olarak, fark feminizmi (*difference*

feminism) ve çeşitlilik feminizmi (*diversity feminism*) bir "kadın" kavramı ortaya koyarken, yapısöküm feminizminin (*deconstruction feminism*) "kadın" da dahil olmak üzere toplumsal inşa sürecinden bağımsız olduğu varsayılan herhangi bir kavramı reddettiği görülmektedir. Bu yaklaşımlarla ilişkilendirilerek (bir özne inşa etmeyi özgürleştirici bir hareket için bir gereklilik olarak görüp görmemelerine göre farklılaşan) iki politik yaklaşım açıklanmaktadır.

19. yüzyılda ve 20. yüzyılın başlarında hâkim olan birinci dalga feminizm, esas olarak mülkiyet hakları ve oy kullanma hakkı gibi kadınların temel insan haklarını elde etmekle ilgilenmekteydi. Öncelikli odak noktası oy hakkıydı. Dolayısıyla en genel anlamda, birinci dalga feminizmin öznesinin anayasal bir demokraside cinsiyetleri nedeniyle oy haklarını kullanmaları engellenen insanlar olduğu söylenebilir. Bu dalga öncelikle orta sınıf, beyaz ve batılı kadınları temel aldığı için baskın bir kimlik dayatmak ve dolayısıyla ayrımcı olmakla eleştirilmiştir. Birinci dalga yalnızca belli bir kadın grubunu temsil ederken kendisini bir "kadın" hareketi olarak sunmuştur. Kimliğin farklı yönlerini göz ardı ederek farklı sosyo-ekonomik sınıflardan, ırklardan vb. kadınları hesaba katmamış, beyaz ve orta sınıf olmayan kadınların deneyimlerini dışlamıştır. Aşırı sınırlı bir grup tarafından oluşturulduğu ve belirli kararlar ancak onları alanların temsiliyeti ile meşrulaştırıldığı için birinci dalganın temsil gücü ve meşruiyet iddiası yetersiz görülmüştür. Bu nedenle beyaz, orta sınıf ve batılı olmayan kadınlar 1970'lerden beri (birinci dalga feminizm tarafından tanımlanan) kadın kategorisini sorgulamaktadır.

Bu nedenle ikinci dalgadaki feministler, anaakım hareketi değiştirmek ve öznesini daha kapsamlı hale getirmek gerektiği düşüncesiyle hareket etmişlerdir. Birinci dalga feminizmin öznesi batılı, beyaz, orta sınıf kadınlar iken, ikinci dalga feminizmin öznesi ırk, etnisite, cinsiyet, sosyal sınıf gibi ek faktörler dikkate alınarak kurulmuştur. İkinci dalgadaki feministler bu özelliklerden kaynaklanan baskıların birbiriyle ilişkili olduğunu göstermeye çalışmış ve hepsini dikkate almayı feminist hareket için bir esas olarak görmüşlerdir.

1960'larda başlayan ikinci dalga feminizm toplumsal ve yasal alanda eşit haklar elde etmeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu dalganın feministleri, bazı belirli rollerin "sosyal olarak"

belirli bir cinsiyete atandığını savunmuştur. Kadının doğası gereği domestik, duygusal ve irrasyonel olduğu için siyasette yer almaması gerektiği gibi erkek egemen varsayımların neden olduğu bu toplumsal rollere bu şekilde karşı çıkılmıştır. Bu hareketin en önemli hamlelerinden biri, özellikle Gayle Rubin'in "cinsiyet/toplumsal cinsiyet sistemi" açıklamasıyla, kadının biyolojik kimliğini toplumsal olarak inşa edilen kimlikten ayırmak olmuştur. Bu sisteme göre biyolojik cinsiyet sabittir, ancak bu, cinsiyetin kadınların ve erkeklerin toplumsal rollerini tanımladığı anlamına gelmez. Cinsiyet biyolojik bedene atıfta bulunurken, toplumsal cinsiyet bedenin sosyal inşasına veya daha doğrusu bedenin sembolik anlamına işaret eder.

Cinsiyet/toplumsal cinsiyet sistemi, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerini ve bu rollerin yarattığı baskıyı biyolojik koşullardan farklı olarak sabit olmayan toplumsal koşullarla ilişkilendirdiği için biyolojik kader düşüncesini olumsuzlamış ve değişim olasılığına alan açmıştır. Bu nedenle bu farklılaştırma sistemi, kadınların maruz kaldığı adaletsizliklere dikkat çekmek ve bunlarla mücadele etmek için önemli bir araç olarak görülmüştür. Ancak bu sistem, biyolojik temelli bir kadın kategorisi oluşturduğu ve bu temeli feminist siyasetin evrensel öznesi olarak sunduğu için üçüncü dalga tarafından eleştirilmiştir. Yani formüle ettiği özne kategorisi farklı ırk, etnisite ve sınıflardan olan kadınları kapsasa da bu kategorinin öznesi cisgender kadınlar olduğu için interseks, trans veya farklı anatomik özelliklere sahip bireyleri dışlamıştır. Dolayısıyla, feminist öznenin böyle bir formülasyonu yeterince kapsayıcı olmadığı için eleştirilmiştir. Diğer bir deyişle, ikinci dalgayla birlikte feminizmin öznesi daha kapsayıcı görünürken, üçüncü dalgadaki feministler için temsil ettiği kimliğin ön kabulü nedeniyle sorun olmaya devam etmiştir.

Üçüncü dalga feminizm postmodernizmin yükselişinin bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Postmodernist özne anlayışını benimseyen feministler temelciliği eleştirmiş ve evrensellik iddiası nedeniyle ikinci dalganın formüle ettiği özneyi sorunsallaştırmıştır. Üçüncü dalgaya göre cinsiyeti ve bedeni biyolojik temeller olarak ele almak sorunludur; çünkü tıpkı toplumsal cinsiyet gibi bunlar da toplumsal inşanın birer ürünüdür. Bu dalgaya göre kadın kategorisine bir temel sağlamak, toplumsal olarak kabul edilebilir olanı herkese dayatarak ve kabul edilebilir olmayanı

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baskılayarak feminist özneyi dışlayıcı kılar; çünkü öznenin sosyal, politik ve hatta kültürel normlar, anlamlar ve otoriteler tarafından inşa edilmesinden önce varolan bir temeli yoktur.

Genel olarak, feminizmin birinci ve ikinci dalgası feminist özneye bir temel atfederek özcü (*essentialist*) bir yaklaşım sergilerken, üçüncü dalga feminizm evrensel bir temelin imkansızlığını iddia ederek feminist özneye yapılandırmacı (*constructivist*) bir yaklaşım getirmiştir. Yani ilk iki dalgada, özünün ataerkil iktidar tarafından yanlış temsil edildiğine inanılan feminist bir özne sunulmuştur. Bu iki dalgada, feministler özü olan bir özne ile onu yanlış temsil ederek baskılayan bir iktidar arasındaki ilişkiye odaklanmıştır ve iktidar karşıtı bir konum almayı feminist öznenin özgürleşmesi için bir gereklilik olarak görmüştür. Üçüncü dalgaya göre ise özne iktidardan ve onun normlarından bağımsız değildir. Dolayısıyla üçüncü dalgada, iktidar karşıtı ve iktidar yanlısı konumlar arasında seçim yapmak reddedilmiştir; çünkü bu dalganın feministlerine göre iktidar özneyi yalnızca baskılayan değil, aynı zamanda onu üreten şeydir.

Basitçe ifade etmek gerekirse, yetersizliklerini görmezden gelerek kimlik siyasetini benimsemek sorunlu görülmüştür. Ancak kimlik, feminist teori veya politikadan tamamen atılamayacağı için çağdaş feministler kimlik ve politikanın birlikte teorileştirilmesi gerektiği fikrini benimsemişlerdir. Bu nedenle, kimliğe dair farklı yaklaşımlar ve formülasyonlar ortaya çıkmaya başlamış ve "kadın" öznesi sorgulanmaya başlanmıştır. Feministler, feminist özneyi evrensel ya da biyolojik bir temele oturtmadan kavramsallaştırma çalışmalarını 1980'lerden bu yana sürdürmektedir.

İnşacılığa geçişle birlikte, feministler feminist öznenin toplumsal bir inşa olduğunu iddia ederek evrensel temelleri reddetmişlerdir, Bununla birlikte, feminist öznenin inşasına dair bir açıklama yapmaları gerekmiştir. Mary G. Dietz, "Current Controversies in Feminist Theory" adlı makalesinde, 1980'ler ve 1990'lar boyunca feminist teorideki tartışmaların çoğunlukla kadın kategorisi altında bir feminizm öznesinin nasıl inşa edileceği (veya edilip edilemeyeceği) sorusuna dayandığını

savunur. Dietz, feminist özne sorununa yönelik baskın yaklaşımları "fark feminizmi," "çeşitlilik feminizmi" ve "yapısöküm feminizmi" şeklinde şematize ederek sunar.

Basitçe, fark feminizmi ve çeşitlilik feminizmi bir kadın kavramı sunarken, yapısöküm feminizmi, toplumsal inşasından önce hiçbir kavramın olmadığını (ve olamayacağını) savunarak kadın kavramını reddeder.

"Kadın" kavramına yönelik bu iki farklı yaklaşıma paralel olarak, yani bu kavramın reddedilip reddedilmeyeceği sorusuna ilişkin olarak, feminist siyasette iki farklı yaklaşım benimsenmiştir.

Genel anlamda, kadın kavramını reddetmeyi sakıncalı bularak birinci yaklaşımı benimseyen teorisyenler bir uzlaşmaya vararak bir koalisyon oluşturmayı amaçlarken, ikinci yaklaşımı benimseyen teorisyenler için bir uzlaşmaya varma çabası bu uzlaşmanın dışında kalan azınlıkların göz ardı edilmesine neden olacağı için kapsamlı bir tartışmanın önünde engel oluşturur.

Örneğin Butler'a göre, kesin olarak tanımlanmış bir özne kategorisi sunmak öznenin tabi kılınmasına neden olmaktadır. Bir agonist olarak öznenin özgürleşmesinin hegemonik normlara karşı çıkmakla mümkün olduğunu savunur. Ona göre böyle bir çatışma yaratmak baskıcı normların anlamını istikrarsızlaştırdığı için onları yeniden yorumlamayı mümkün kılar. Butler için direniş bu şekilde mümkündür.

Bu çalışmanın ikinci bölümünde ise özerklik için egemen bir öznenin gerekli olduğu varsayımına karşı çıkan Butler'ın performatiflik teorisi sunulmaktadır. Butler, kimlik kazanma sürecini performatif bir şey olarak tanımlayarak, postmodern özneye faillik atfeder. "Parodik tekrar" tabiriyle, (cinsiyet kimliğimizi edindiğimiz) normların sürekli tekrarın bir sonucu olarak doğal göründüğünü ve bu nedenle onlara karşı koymanın, onları yıkıcı bir şekilde tekrarlamakla mümkün olduğunu savunur. Bu şekilde, feminist öznenin tanımlanmadan ve/veya normların dışında kalmadan normlara direnmesi için bir yol sunar.

Postmodern feminizmin sorunsallaştırılmasının nedenlerinden biri, Aydınlanma'nın değerlerinden, özellikle de feminist teoriden ayrılmaz olarak kabul edilen özerklik

değerinden vazgeçmesidir. Geleneksel olarak, öznenin özerkliği öznenin aşkın, yani toplumsal koşulları aşan/bağımsız bir şey olarak anlaşılmasına dayanır. Yani özerklik için egemen bir özne gerekli görülmüştür. Bu nedenle özneyi toplumsal bir inşa ve dolayısıyla toplumsal koşullara bağlı olan bir şey olarak tanımlamak, bu öznenin özerkliğinin sorgulanmasına sebep olmuştur.

Judith Butler, kimliği sadece bize verilen ve edilgen bir şekilde içselleştirilen bir şey olarak değil, aynı zamanda yaşadığımız ve inşası bizim aktif katılımımıza bağlı olan bir şey olarak formüle ederek feminist özne üzerine performatif bir bakış açısı sunmuştur. Kimlik kazanma sürecini hiç bitmeyen bir norm-tekrarı süreci olarak tanımlayarak, postmodern özneye faillik atfetmiş ve böylece direniş ve değişim için alan yaratmıştır. Bu şekilde Butler, normlara karşı çıkmanın alternatif bir yolunu sunar. Ona göre, parodik tekrarla, bireyler normların dışında bir konum olduğu yanılgısına düşmeden normlara direnebilir ve hatta normları değiştirebilirler.

Bu çalışmanın üçüncü bölümünde, feminist öznenin farklı formülasyonlarının bir orta yolu olarak Butler'ın "olumsal temeller" terimi sunulmuştur. En genel anlamda, modern feminizmin formülasyonuna göre özne bir temele oturtulurken, postmodern özne formülasyonunun temelcilik karşıtı olduğu görülmektedir. Butler ise hem ayrımcılığa neden olan temelci yaklaşımın sorunlu formülasyonundan hem de temelcilik karşıtlığının kolektiviteyi sınırlama tehlikesinden kaçınır. Feminist özne için evrenselliği değil olumsallığı temel alarak, özne için bir kategori sunmakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda kategoriyi farklı yorumlara açık hale getirir. Ancak, böyle bir kategori evrensel veya bağımsız bir standart tarafından kısıtlanmadığı için feminist amaçları koruyacağını veya anti-feminist amaçları reddedeceğini garanti edememektedir.

Postmodern feminizmin sorunsallaştırılmasının bir başka nedeni de kadın kategorisine dair her türlü evrensel temeli reddetmesidir. Postmodernizme geçiş öncesinde kadın kategorisi evrensel bir temele oturtulmuş ve bu temel siyasal temsil ve kolektivite için bir gereklilik olarak görülmüştür. Ancak evrensel olarak temsil gücüne sahip bir temel bulunmadığı için, bu tür bir temel, kategorinin daha önce de iddia edildiği gibi ayrımcı olmasına neden olmuştur.

Bir agonist olarak, Butler argümanlarını bireylere ve onların günlük eylemlerine odaklanarak oluşturur. Ancak, feminizmin evrensel kadın kategorisini benimsemesinin nedeninin kadını politik özne olarak kamusal alanda görünür kılmak olduğunun farkındadır. Bu yüzden, bir postyapısalcı olarak, hiçbir temelin evrensel temsil gücüne sahip olmadığını iddia etse de bir kategoriye ve dolayısıyla bir temele olan ihtiyacı reddetmez. Butler'a göre evrensel temeller imkansızdır ancak temeller gereklidir. Bu yüzden feminist özneye alternatif bir temel sunar. Feminist bir özne sunmak ve kadınlığa dair farklı ya da yeni yorumları göz ardı etmeden feminist politikalar yürütmek için kadın kategorisinin evrenselliğe değil olumsallığa dayanması gerektiğini iddia eder. Ona göre feminist özne, evrensel temsil gücüne sahip temellerin var olduğu yanılgısına düşmeden, olumsal temellerle temsil edilebilir.

Butler'a göre, daha önce de belirtildiği gibi, feminist özne kategorisi gelecekteki dahil olma taleplerini önceden engellememek için sürekli olarak açık, tartışmalı ve olumsal bırakılmalıdır. Ancak bu açıklık, direnişin ve değişimin yönünü belirsizleştirmektedir. Dolayısıyla, böyle bir kategori yeniden yorumlamaya açık olduğu kadar yanlış kullanıma da açıktır. Başka bir deyişle, Butler'a göre böyle bir kategori ile feminist hareket ve buna bağlı değişimler mümkündür. Ancak yeniden anlamlandırmanın yönü belirsiz olduğundan ve bu anlamlandırma süreci hiç bitmediğinden, yani bir sınırı olmadığından sonuçları tahmin edilememektedir.

Bu çalışmanın son bölümünde ise Butler'ın sonraki çalışmalarına odaklanılmaktadır. Bu çalışmaları göz önünde bulundurarak, bir önceki bölümde ele alınan sorun yeniden ele alınmaktadır. Bu sorunların, Butler'ın argümantasyonundaki normatiflik eksikliğinden kaynaklandığı ileri sürülmekte ve Butler daha sonraki çalışmalarında normatif iddialarda bulunsa da, bu iddiaların pozitif ve negatif yeniden anlamlandırma arasında bir ayrım yapmak ve dolayısıyla da feminist hareketin yönünü kaybetme riskini ortadan kaldırmak için yeterli olmadığı tartışılmaktadır.

Başka bir deyişle, pozitif ve negatif değişim arasında net bir fark olmamasının ve dolayısıyla direniş eylemlerinin ve bu yolla yaratılan değişimin yönünün belirsiz olmasının nedeninin Butler'ın ilk eserlerindeki normatiflik eksikliği olduğu savunulmaktadır. Daha sonraki çalışmaları göz önüne alındığında, Butler'ın bu

sorunun, yani normatif yargılar olmadan feminist hareketin yönünü kaybetme riskinin farkında olduğu görülmektedir. Butler bu çalışmalarında, karşılıklı bağımlılık (*interdependency*) açısından normatif iddialarda bulunur. Benliği başkalarıyla ilişkisel bir şey olarak yeniden kavramsallaştırır ve bu karşılıklı bağımlılığı etiğin temeli olarak sunar. Bu şekilde geleneksel etik anlayışına farklı bir bakış açısı sağlar.

Ancak, bu iddialar ile olumlu ve olumsuz olan arasında bir ayrım yapmak hala mümkün görünmemektedir. Yani Butler sonraki çalışmalarında karşılıklı bağımlılığa dayalı bir etik kategorisi ortaya koyar ve bu şekilde birbirimize olan sorumluluğumuza işaret eder ve adaletsiz siyasi stratejileri eleştirir. Ancak, daha güçlü normatif yargılar olmaksızın, bu temelde yürütülen siyasetin adil olacağının veya bu karşılıklı bağımlılığın etik çözümler sağlayacağının garantisi yoktur. Butler'a göre birbirimizin ihtiyaçlarına cevap vermek hepimizin ahlaki yükümlülüğüdür. Ancak iyi-kötü ve olumlu-olumsuz cevap biçimleri arasında net bir ayrım yapılmadan, bu yükümlülüğün amacı ve bu cevapların yönü belirsiz kalmaya mahkumdur. Başka bir deyişle, karşılıklı bağımlılık kavramı kendi başına normatif olmadığı için Butler'ın argümantasyonu feminist harekete belirli bir yön sağlamaz. Bu anlamda, Butler'ın normatif iddiaları feminist hareketin yönünü gerekçelendirmek ve onu korumayı garanti etmek için yetersiz görünmektedir.

Feminizmi gelecekteki olasılıklara açık kılmak için feminist öznenin kimliğini yeniden inşaya ve kategorisini yeniden yorumlamaya açmak şüphesiz ki gereklidir. Ancak feminist hareketin yönünü kaybetme riski düşünüldüğünde bu açıklık tek başına yeterli değildir.

Normatif yargıları zorunlu kılan yeniden inşacı (*reconstructive*) eleştiri ile bu tür yargılardan kaçınmayı amaçlayan yapısökümcü (*deconstructive*) eleştiri arasında uzlaşı sağlamak, ilk bakışta birbirlerini dışlıyor gibi göründükleri için mümkün görünmemektedir. Ancak iki yöntemin de bize önemli araçlar sağladığı göz önünde bulundurulduğunda böyle bir uzlaşının gerekli olduğu görülebilir. Yani yapısöküm bize baskı ve tahakküme karşı harekete geçmek için ihtiyaç duyduğumuz ve bir kenara atamayacağımız bir araç sağlar. Ancak onu normatif yargılarla kuramsallaştırmak ve bu yolla bu aracın ötesine geçmek de ütopya fikrinin kalıcı olabilmesi için gereklidir.

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