

The Other's Others

Otherring and Marginalisation in French Feminism and Beyond

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*'[La femme] se détermine et se différencie par rapport à
l'homme et non celui-ci par rapport à elle; elle est l'inessentiel
en face de l'essentiel. Il est le Sujet, il est l'Absolu: elle est l'Autre.'*

Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe*, 1949

In her seminal work of 1949, *Le Deuxième sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir defined the status of women in society as being that of 'l'Autre'. However, just as society has evolved and changed, so have our methods of understanding and analysing it; with the emergence of subsequent waves of feminism and new forms of criticism, such as queer studies and postcolonial studies, new approaches to and conceptions of 'l'Autre' have developed. The question is how far we have really come: sixty years on, to what extent – or how – are women defined by their 'otherness'? The hope of the world's women standing in unity has been shattered by the alleged ethnocentrism and heterosexism of Western feminist movements, which creates its own Others: the Other's Others. Consequently, how have notions of, and reactions to, 'l'Autre' changed? What groupings are formed by the reconfiguration of the Other, and what are the intersections and tensions between these different forms of 'otherness'? Finally, how is 'l'Autre' represented in different cultural mediums such as French and Francophone literature and film, television, journalism and the internet?

Panel 1 – First Wave Others

Claire Guérin (St John's College, Oxford)

From the *Cahiers de Jeunesse 1926-1930*, to the *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*: Simone de Beauvoir's fascination with the Other.

At the age of 18, whilst studying philosophy at the Sorbonne, Simone de Beauvoir began a personal diary in which she kept a record of her everyday reactions to others, to her readings and to new philosophical ideas. On 10 July 1927 she considers the philosophical themes which most appeal to her. Her preference for one particular topic is striking, « Le thème est presque toujours cette opposition de moi et de l'autre que j'ai sentie en commençant de vivre. Maintenant est venu le temps d'en faire une synthèse »¹. Published in 2008, Beauvoir's *Cahiers de jeunesse 1926-1930* (2008) provide a fascinating insight into the embryonic thought of a woman who

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Cahiers de Jeunesse 1926-1930* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), p. 367

was to become so iconic to 20th Century feminism, and in particular, betray her initial enthrallment in a philosophical problem which would become a major thread throughout her later works: The problem of the Other.

Within my paper I intend to examine the presence of this theme within Beauvoir's early notebooks, investigating the multiple references to the Other in her strikingly mature reflections on the difficulties of achieving mutuality and reciprocity with another, through her complex considerations of relationships of friendship, love and marriage. More specifically, I scrutinise the young Simone's evocations of her specific relationships with her sister, her close friend Zaza, and her fellow philosophy students, including Sartre. Turning to the later work, *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958), in which Beauvoir describes many of the same events from the mature perspective of an established writer, I compare Beauvoir's differing approaches to this central question. With the help of clues from some intervening fictional and theoretical texts in which the role of the Other is a major concern, (*L'Invitée* (1943), *Le Sang des Autres* (1945), *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949)), I thus trace the development of Beauvoir's thinking concerning the Other, and offer some examples of her suggestions for overcoming the difficulties of attaining genuine reciprocity.

Andreea Dimitriu (Université d'Angers)

La féministe – une autre pour les autres (le féminisme de la première vague)

L'Autre, tel qu'il est démontré et affirmé par Simone de Beauvoir, est la femme, toujours par comparaison avec lui, qui est « le Sujet, l'Absolu ». En cette situation, si la femme est définie comme l'Autre, comment on définit la féministe ? Parce que la féministe est une femme qui lutte pour les autres femmes, qui se manifeste comme un Autre, mais qui est considérée comme un Autre aussi des hommes, aussi des femmes.

En conséquence, on peut dire que la féministe est un Autre pour les autres, et un Autre qui lutte pour les autres. L'Autre dont il s'agira dans cet article, se sera la féministe, qui se détermine et se différencie par rapport aux femmes et aux hommes.

Comment on définit et on présente la féministe ? Quels sont ses traits physiques et du caractère et comment est-elle vue par la société ? Ces sont seulement quelques interrogations, concernant le sujet, qui seront abordés et discutés dans cet article.

L'Autre, en temps que féministe, a des moyens différents de se manifester dans la société et de faire connaître ses idées aux autres. Il est intéressant de voir et de chercher comment la femme, vue comme un Autre, se définit comme féministe, vue aussi comme un Autre, dans la société française de l'entre-deux-guerres.

Panel 2 – Postcolonial Others

Silvia Baage (University of Maryland)

Post-Colonial Otherness and Othering as a Danse Macabre: Representations of the Other in Maryse Condé's *Crossing the Mangrove*

My research focuses on the theoretical concept of the island in French and Francophone literatures. I posit that formerly colonized islands and their discourses are epistemological tools to understand Otherness and Othering. Therefore, I am particularly interested in how the island defines itself in relationship to the Other, la métropole, the results of its being defined by the Other, as well as the junction of this dialectic. Maryse Condé's novel *Crossing the Mangrove* (1989) is an illustration of these complex dynamics in a space that is, on the one hand, marginalized through its geographic location and socio-economic status, but on the other hand, a cosmopolitan hub of trajectories that lead to and from all corners of the world, bringing together different cultures and races in what Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant referred to as the process of creolization (*In Praise of Creoleness*).

Condé's polyphonic narratives of both men and women thus materialize a kaleidoscopic vision of the Guadeloupian society, their vision(s) of Otherness, and the act of Othering. Based on Baudelaire's poem *Danse macabre* and its allegorical representation of Death as a dancing beauty, I posit that Condé's novel evokes post-colonial Otherness in a marginalized world, particularly for women, as a *danse macabre*. Extending on Dawn Fulton's allegorical reading of Condé's novel, I will analyze three representations of female Otherness and its implications through the metaphor of the *danse macabre*: First, I will study the aesthetics of the female body and its use of space as a paradigm for female Otherness on the island. I will then explore the notion of the female Other through the presence of women from French France (Philcox's translation for *la métropole*). Lastly, I will extrapolate on the story-teller Xanatippe's vision of Death as a Negress.

Akila Kizzi (Centre d'Etudes Féminines et Etudes de Genre (Université de Paris VIII))

La différence identitaire en marge de l'errance et de la résistance chez Taos Amrouche dans *La Jacinthe noire*

La différence est perçue comme une approche complexe avec de multiples conceptions, elle s'étale sur plusieurs champs d'études. L'interaction multidisciplinaire engendrée par l'analyse dans l'étude de la marginalité, la différence et l'altérité - comme conséquences des comportements sociaux- nous incite à nous intéresser à la marginalité comme une sorte de leitmotiv pour cultiver la différence non pas comme un élément séparateur mais plutôt comme une revendication dans la redéfinition de leur position identitaire. En partant avec l'idée de déconstruire et briser les idées reçues, les stéréotypes et les clichés dominants apparents chez l'Autre. Ma communication s'appuiera sur une œuvre littéraire écrite en 1935 par la première romancière francophone algérienne Taos Amrouche, intitulée « *Jacinthe noire* » un roman autobiographique. L'auteur met en exergue son sentiment d'être marginalisée par sa différence culturelle, identitaire et même physique. Marie-Thérèse - étudiante dans un pensionnat parisien- qui raconte sa relation avec Reine, jeune tunisienne, fraîchement arrivée et aussitôt perdue et déçue dans cette pension. Par sa différence, « ...alors j'ai vu ses yeux noirs, étranges » son exaltation, sa fierté et sa personnalité, Reine s'est retrouvée dans la position d'écartement et d'isolement par la directrice du pensionnat entourée par les étudiantes. Marie-Thérèse nous raconte comment dans ce huis-clos, les étudiantes (Françaises) agissent pour exclure l'intruse, en s'affrontant sur un fond d'obscurantisme religieux, raciste et colonial « ...elle est d'une autre race ». La religion est l'axe principal autour duquel sévit la ségrégation entre Reine et les filles en la repoussant. La lutte que mène Reine contre les idées reçues et les stéréotypes de ses co- pensionnaires est quotidienne. En se sentant rejetée, Reine continue à cultiver sa différence en résistant à sa manière. L'histoire malheureusement se termine mal car Reine renonce à poursuivre ses études à Paris, abandonne le pensionnat et rentre chez elle.

Sotonye Omuku (UCL)

Siting slavery: Representing the female body in Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* and Ly's *Les noctuelles vivent de larmes*

The study of slavery and slavery-related practices in Francophone sub-Saharan Africa has been the subject of extensive historical and anthropological study in recent decades. However, the impact of the memory of slavery and the slave trade on, and their representation within the literature of this region has been largely neglected because of the paucity of fiction on the subject.

The notion of the slave as the Other, whether this is in the context of domestic, trans-Saharan, or transatlantic slavery, creates a social hierarchy in which the female is lower than the male slave. Where racial and socio-cultural differences form the basis for discrimination against persons of slave status, sexual distinction becomes a defining characteristic which sets the female slave further on the margins of society. Thus there is a predominant theme in the corpus of Francophone sub-Saharan literature on slavery which shows the body of the woman as the site of slavery. Significantly this relates not only to sexuality, and sexual abuse; it manifests itself also in the woman's inability to reproduce and nurture children.

Drawing on trauma theory, and specifically the notion of trauma as a physical wound, this paper will examine the female body as a narrative of the memory of slavery through the works of two Malian authors – Yambo

Ouologuem in *Le devoir de violence* (1968) and Ibrahima Ly in *Les noctuelles vivent de larmes* (1988). I will consider the representation of the memory of slavery in the female body through the physical position of the woman within her surroundings, and the ways in which notions of womanhood are treated in these novels.

Panel 3 – Literary Others

Virginie Sauzon (Warwick University)

Nouveaux visages de la prostitution : Grisélidis Réal et « La révolution invisible »

« Se prostituer est un acte révolutionnaire »² : voilà ce que clamait Grisélidis Réal, écrivaine et prostituée suisse qui a toujours milité en faveur des travailleurs du sexe (occupation de la chapelle Saint-Bernard à Paris en 1975, fondation de l'association Aspasia à Genève en 1982). Décédée en 2005, même son enterrement a créé la polémique et ravivé les questions morales sur la prostitution. Ainsi le livre *14 femmes, pour un féminisme pragmatique*, qui rassemble des portraits de femmes offrant la possibilité de repenser le militantisme aujourd'hui, s'ouvre-t-il sur « Grisélidis Réal, féminisme initiatique »³.

Car ce que montrent ses textes, fictifs, autobiographiques et / ou militants, c'est que l'Autre, c'est la femme prostituée, hors-norme d'une féminité acceptable et du couple sain, rejetée en raison de son incapacité à rentrer dans le cadre de la morale sociale ; méprisée par les hommes, certes, mais non moins par les femmes, qui voient en elle une rivale dégénéréscente. Le féminisme même confine parfois les prostituées à l'invisibilité, tant il est tentant d'en rester à une image monolithique et forcément négative.

Puisqu'il faut qu'elle soit marginale, alors la prostituée parle ici depuis la multiplicité des marges : illégalité, violence, mais aussi clandestinité (*Le noir est une couleur*, 1974), prison (*Suis-je encore vivante ?*, 2008), ou maladie (*Les Sphinx*, 2006). La voix de cette auteure engagée entre alors en résonance avec d'autres, comme Virginie Despentes, un écho qui souligne l'importance de cette question capitale et pourtant encore obscure. Assumant et réinterprétant sa marginalité, offrant à la prostitution une existence littéraire renouvelée, Grisélidis Réal révèle, par ses lettres, textes et entretiens, qu'existe bien la possibilité de rendre visible une courtisanerie révolutionnaire, à la fois libre, sacrée et éminemment politique.

Lara Cox (University of Exeter)

The 'Other of his Same' meets the barred Other: Representations of women and Spectatorship in Fernando Arrabal's *Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs* (1969)

In this paper, I address two meanings of the Other in French psychoanalysis in relation to Fernando Arrabal's *Et ils passèrent des menottes aux fleurs* (1969): the 'Other of his Same' and the barred Other. Both describe the 'feminine' position of being in discourse. The 'Other of his Same', a term coined by Luce Irigaray, denotes the restrictive set of roles that women, under patriarchy, are permitted to play. More optimistically, the Lacanian 'barred Other,' on the other hand, undercuts the linguistic Other. This latter masquerades as the guarantor of ontological consistency and espouser of dominant ideologies.

Based in Paris, the playwright Fernando Arrabal has rarely been considered for his commentary on gender difference. In this play, the specificities of feminine sexuality are sidelined as a masculine martyr champions the re-birth of humanity. Arrabal instructed that each spectator watch the dramatic action in solitude, separated from loved ones and social groups.

I argue that the two versions of the psychoanalytic Other are in tension in Arrabal's play: the female dramatic characters on the stage correspond to Irigaray's marginalised Other; by contrast, the unique conditions of

² G. Réal, « Se prostituer est un acte révolutionnaire », dans *Carnet de bal d'une courtisane*, *ibid*, p. 92.

³ G. Bantegnie, Y. Benhamed Daho, J. Sorman, S. Vincent, *14 femmes, pour un féminisme pragmatique*, Paris, Gallimard, 2007, p. 19.

viewing the play permit the spectator to potentially reach the barred Other. Freed from the social pressures of watching this play as a cohesive audience, the spectator can escape the stranglehold of dominant ideologies and the gender normativity displayed on the stage.

I argue that the concept of 'otherness' is far from redundant for feminism, precisely because of the slipperiness of the term. The lack of fixed meaning of the Other in Arrabal's work creates the opportunity to re-signify it as a conceptual tool, so that it is more conducive to a feminist politics. I do not, as materialist feminists such as Jill Dolan (1991) and Sue-Ellen Case (1990), conceptualise a model of feminist theatre spectatorship based on critical reasoning and identity politics. Rather, the multivalent psychoanalytic Other enables me to conceptualise an *unconscious* feminist modality of theatre spectatorship of what would typically be construed as a misogynist play.

Panel 4 – Current debates in feminism

Katie Billotte (Royal Holloway)

Resurrecting Feminism from the Rubble: An Examination of 'L'Autre' and Haitian Feminism after the 2010 Earthquake

On Tuesday 12 January 2010, Haiti was shaken by a magnitude 7.0M_w earthquake. Conservative estimates place the number of people killed at 230,000. Among the earthquake's victims were Myriam Merlet, Magalie Marcelin and Anne Marie Coriolan. Together these women constituted the core of Haiti's nascent feminist movement, and their deaths call into question the future of that movement. This paper will examine the coverage of these women's deaths both inside and outside of Haiti and discuss the ways in which, even in death, these women were constructed as 'L'Autre' both by Haitians and by Western feminists. I will examine obituaries from both the West and the developing world, with particular attention to French language sources from various countries and from Haitian immigrant communities. I will use the example of Merlet's, Marcelin's, and Coriolan's deaths to explore how feminist in the developing world are portrayed as 'L'Autre' *par excellence*. The aim of this paper, however, will be to break beyond the conventional descriptions of 'Third World' feminism as being in opposition to its own cultural context and 'Western' feminism. Instead, I hope to explore the greater complexity of this 'Othering' which, I believe, does not just differentiate between "traditional society" and "feminism" or "The Third World" and "The West", but, rather, fractures along other and often unexpected lines. This includes the ways in which feminists in various parts of the developing world see one another as 'L'Autre'. By exploring these frequently ignored lines of division, it might be possible to better understand how emerging feminist movements in place such as Haiti might be assisted by the global activist community.

Salima Amari (Centre d'Etudes Féminines et Etudes de Genre (Université de Paris VIII))

La question lesbienne dans un contexte postcolonial et de migrations maghrébines en France

La construction médiatique, politique et sociologique des femmes « d'origine » maghrébine comme « l'Autre » en France passe souvent par des représentations stéréotypées. Cet « Autre » est représenté par un monolithe qui peut prendre plusieurs formes (mariages forcés, polygamie, virginité, voile, femmes battues...etc.) mais reste toujours composé d'un seul élément (la soumission). Comment se présente la situation lorsque ces mêmes femmes ne rentrent pas dans ce schéma classique ? Quelle est la place des lesbiennes « d'origine » maghrébine en France dans les discours politique et scientifique ?

Dans ma communication, je vais essayer de montrer comment la question lesbienne dans un contexte postcolonial et de migration maghrébine en France perturbe la conception faite jusqu'à présent de « l'Autre ». Un Autre qui devient soudainement un Sujet qui « leur ressemble » au moment où la construction de l'Autre se fait sur la différence. Comment considérer ces femmes, qui à première vue échappent à l'ordre établi, au moment où l'image donnée a souvent été figée sur des femmes maghrébines soumises à des hommes (pères, frères, maris, garçons des quartiers) ? Est-ce que l'association d'un double « Autre » en tant que lesbienne et « d'origine » maghrébine annule la construction initiale pour se retrouver avec une sorte de « même » ?

Katya Salmi (University of Sussex)

Banning the Burqa in France: Deploying Feminist Arguments to Strengthen French National Identity

In 2004, a law banning 'ostentatious' religious signs in public schools, but specifically targeting the hijab, created a whirlwind of debates concerning the integration of postcolonial migrants in French society, and especially French Muslims. Today, the French government is currently in the process of legislating against the burqa in all public spaces, the result of a nation-wide debate launched in summer 2009. Three main arguments are deployed to defend a widespread ban: the secularist, the national and the feminist arguments, all of which were previously deployed to argue for a ban of the hijab in schools. However, the debate on the burqa in France cannot be dissociated from another contemporary debate: the national identity debate launched in November 2009.

Analysing the three main arguments employed in support of an all-out ban of the burqa, this paper will argue that these arguments, and particularly the feminist arguments, rely on a racialised and essentialised conception of the Muslim woman in France. Engaging with previous debates on the hijab and contextualizing the contemporary debates on national identity and the burqa, this paper will demonstrate how both mainstream feminists and 'minority' feminist groups, such as Ni Putes Ni Soumises, employ and reify a racialised image of French Muslims, particularly that of North African origin, by drawing on the stereotype of the submissive and oppressed Muslim woman at the hands of her father, husband, brother, and in general a supposedly sexist religion. Finally, this paper will explore the wider context of the ongoing debate on national identity, questioning the extent to which the debate on the burqa in turn serves to reaffirm a very specific and particularistic French national identity and to renew the republican tradition.