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Communicating Solidarity: Theorizing a Coalitional Feminist Ethic of Love

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Abstract:

The paradoxes of freedom and identity work to constrain feminist theory, problematize feminist activism, and fragment feminist coalitions. In the context of evolving theories of identity politics, the ethics of love operate as a counter-hegemonic framework for affective political mobilization, providing a way to ‘bridge across the chasm’ of differences without commodifying or eliminating difference. By reclaiming ‘love’, or, more specifically, philosophy in the feminine, Irigaray (2002) suggests that philosophy will come to value and account for intersubjectivity, dialogue in difference, and an attention to the present moment. Badiou describes love as beginning with a chance encounter and constituting an event that forever changes people. By putting Badiou and Irigaray into conversation a discursive framework emerges that shifts us towards an affective epistemology predicated not on the individual, consumption, or identity, but on collectivity, mutuality, and trust. Alongside Irigaray’s feminist articulation of love, I elaborate Badiou’s concept of love, arguing that the two together provide the affective potential for a positive, creative, and affirmative experience of difference. Through love identity is changed. Conceptualizing love as a radical political and discursive framework for acknowledging difference, engaging ethics, and transcending individuated identity allows us to conceptualize new ways of being in relation with the other, new rhetorical appeals to solidarity, and new sites of discourse analysis.

Introduction

The paradoxes of freedom and identity work to constrain feminist theory, problematize feminist activism, and fragment feminist coalitions. While feminists have theorized, organized, and united against shared oppressions, a persistent emphasis on identity and difference obscures analysis of the collective ethics which bond diverse feminisms. As feminist coalitions assemble with other social movements they are challenged to articulate their collective feminist ethics to broader activist publics. Analyzing feminist organizations as they collaborate with other social movements presents a unique discursive opportunity to deconstruct the exigency of collectivistic feminist ethics. As feminist coalitions contribute to other movements they are challenged to construct collective antagonisms in a framework which is consistent with an ambiguous feminist ethic. Articulating an ethics of feminism is a communicative challenge; an emphasis on the construction of collective antagonisms overwhelms an analysis of feminism's positive fidelity. Feminists have not only critiqued discourses of neoliberalism, racism, colonialism, and innumerable politics of -isms but they have called attention to their significant and unequal relationships to gender and sexuality. Joining broader social movements and establishing collective antagonisms as sources of "shared oppression" risks obscuring the ethos of the feminist contribution.

The plurality of feminist theory and praxis is uniquely positioned in this moment of transforming identity politics and coalitions of difference. Associations of feminism with the negative, anti-capitalism, anti-patriarchy, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and so on,

have constituted internal camps within feminist theory around discourses of opposition while simultaneously representing their broader universal and collective purpose as opposition to, rather than support of, a *Truth*. The ethics of feminism, through this formulation of the negative, must be rejected as insular and detached. In reference to Badiou's (2012b) *Ethics*, I critique modalities of feminist ethical consensus constructed around the evil, or the anti-. This essay creates an opening for a plurality of feminist truths. As Badiou maintains, 'the only genuine ethics is of truths in the plural – or more precisely, the only ethics is of processes of truth, of the labor that brings *some* truths into the world' (Badiou 2012b: 28). Locating feminism's ethical pluralism requires feminist activists, philosophers, and scholars to transcend the negative and navigate the identity politics that seek to fragment feminisms. This project seeks to locate the fidelity of feminism in the positive; 'putting Badiou to work in this way we can conceive feminism as the discourse with which woman sustains herself as subject' (*Badiou Studies* 4.1 CFP). Reconstituting the negative as an infinite alterity Badiou enlightens this effort to articulate a feminist subject of unity among infinite pluralities. Badiou identifies four Truth procedures: Science, Politics, Art, and Love. Feminism is conceived through political processes which establish a human collectivity capable of bringing new truths into the world. However, beyond the political, feminism is intimately connected to the procedures of Love: the encounter with difference and the struggle against separation foreground the feminist subject's engagement with the other. The Badiouian relations between Politics and Love generate an affective potential for a positive, creative, and affirmative experience of difference.

In an effort to emphasize a positive feminist fidelity, this essay moves in three parts. In the first, feminism is conceptualized as a truth process emerging from the antagonisms of politics and love. Challenging the subject of contemporary feminism this move is inward, internal, and affective. Establishing a positive, creative, and affirmative experience of difference is integral to repositioning feminist ethical consensus around the capability for Good, the capability for a positive coalition of difference. The resulting feminist formulation offers new theories of identity, expanded coalitional possibilities, and new relations of solidarity. Moving from an emphasis on politics and difference to an emphasis on love and the same, this essay's second motion brings Badiou into conversation with Luce Irigaray. Irigaray elucidates the need for philosophy in the feminine and explicates the role of love in recognition of the other. Understanding the world as beginning with alterity, difference, and plurality Badiou and Irigaray advance a radical ethical and communicative framework for acknowledging difference and transcending individuated identity. Separately Badiou and Irigaray illuminate complementary, but not co-determinate, methods of engaging difference. For Badiou, both political and amorous truths are contingent on fidelity to the event and exist as multiple and different. For Irigaray, truth is already always at least two: masculine and feminine / rational and amorous. For both, the truth conceives of the subject in a space of Lacanian lack. For Badiou, this unnamable exists outside the coherence of the subject-language. For Irigaray, it is the very lack itself, the silence of language and the sensory attention, that is needed to establish new ways of being in relation with the other. In its third motion, this essay gives energy to this lack. By examining solidarity

statements as dual traces of *eventual* truths, this essay formulates a pluralist feminist ethic that orients itself around the positive. Instead of approaching difference from a consensus on the negative, the anti-, the formulation inspired by Badiou and Irigaray allows us to approach the same from a position of difference. The Badiouan feminist ethic maps on to Irigaray's duality of the encounter to argue that unity begins with duality; the corresponding feminist ethic privileges a *we* that is the subject to be worked for.

Feminism: Between Politics and Love

Politics goes from difference to the same, love introduces difference to the same.

– Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event* (2013a: 41).

Badiou (2012c) describes love as beginning with a chance encounter and constituting an event that forever changes people; in love individuals are challenged to see the world 'from the point of view of two and not one' (Badiou 2012c: 22). Badiou argues that love creates a framework in which we experience, develop, and live from 'the point of view of difference and not identity' (2012c: 22). Internalizing this understanding, 'love's main enemy, the one I must defeat, is not the other, it is myself, the "myself" that prefers identity to difference, that prefers to impose its world against the world re-constructed through the filter of difference' (Badiou 2012c: 60). This framework shifts us towards an ontology predicted not on rationality, competition, or identity, but on reflexivity,

difference, and collectivity. This shift is necessarily inward and political, and simultaneously outward and affective. In this way, love is understood as an existential project, a truth process capable of constructing a world de-centered from identity and recognition of the other. Each necessarily ethical in their own way, Love and Politics intersect to establish the field of truth procedures which illuminate an infinite plurality of feminist theorizing. The ethical dimension is positioned at the origin of Badiou's corpus; Badiou begins with difference, arguing that alterity is all that can be known to be universal. Politics is understood as the capacity to take difference and effectuate the same. Love remains then to punctuate the same with difference.

Articulating love in the political, Badiou (2012c) acknowledges the fragmentation inherent within Gramscian theories of politics emphasizing hegemony. However, giving hope to love, he argues that 'love really does have universal power, but that it is simply the opportunity we are given to enjoy a positive, creative, affirmative experience of difference' (Badiou 2012c: 66). In love the logic of identity is challenged, the rationality of self-interest disproved, and the emphasis on competition repurposed. (Un)Tying feminism's strands of Politics and Love the resulting knot is revealed in a *splace*, 'the place of the subjective, the outplace [...] the double articulation of the two: placement and excess' (Badiou 2013b:169). It is between placement (resistance and the anti-) and excess (pluralism and utopia) that we may locate the fidelity of feminism's ethics in the positive. Abandoning recognition of the other Badiou postulates: 'the real question – and it is an extremely difficult one – is much more that of *recognizing the Same*' (Badiou 2012b:

25). What is universal, or the same, is Politics and Loves, or feminisms, event-encounters with difference. That we can encounter and experience the world from the position of two and not one suggests that we can make a declaration of love and ‘embark on a construction of truth’ (Badiou 2012c: 42). In contradistinction to the logic of the anti-, Badiou insists that it is our positive capability for Good that emboldens our effort to extirpate evil. In this way, the call to love is a call to conscience in the construction of coalitional identities, subjectivities, and agencies.

A unity composed of differentiated material is not contingent on collective antagonisms or shared identity but is predicated on the human capacity to love, to share the world from the view of two and not one. The logic of the anti-, the positioning of an evil to identify the Good, seeks to create a coalition of differences articulated in the negative. For Badiou, it is from operationalizing difference in the positive that we understand the ethical capability of the Good. Badiou demonstrates the internal contradiction of positioning difference in the negative through a critique of the discourses surrounding human rights and the contemporary ethic of “respect for differences”. By recognizing evil as that which stands in opposition to human rights, and organizing around the anti-, an identity is constituted which circumvents the quest to understand the positive capacity of the Good. Communicating an ethical “respect for differences” is preceded by an omission that ‘respect for differences applies only to those differences that are reasonably consistent with this identity’ (Badiou 2012b: 24). Against consensus, and recognizing that difference is unknowable, Badiou guides us through an ethical event-

encounter with difference. Where politics encounters this difference as an antagonism, overcoming difference in the negative to make more politics in the positive; Love encounters and experiences difference as always already its other in the eternal process of becoming the same. ‘This is why love is creative. It constructs a singular experience of difference. This is a unique, radical, intense, and vital experience, to the point that the difficulties it encounters, the threats of its interruption, are dramatic’ (Badiou 2013a: 44). In this way, the space between politics and love is inherently temporal and affective. The strands of politics and love which knot the feminist space are (un)tyed by these interruptions and internal dramas.

Understanding the feminist subject formation, and positioning a coalitional ethic of feminism, necessitates recognizing the feminist truth process between Love and Politics as *eventual*. Badiou identifies three major dimensions of a truth process: *event*, *fidelity*, and *truth*:

‘The *event*, which brings to pass “something other” than the situation, opinions, instituted knowledge’s; the event is a hazardous, unpredictable supplement, which vanishes as soon as it appears; the *fidelity*, which is the name of the process: it amounts to a sustained investigation of the situation, under the imperative of the event itself; it is an immanent and continuing break; the *truth* as such, that is, the multiple, internal to the situation, that the fidelity constructs, bit by bit; it is what the fidelity gathers together and produces.’ (2012b: 67-68)

Existing between Politics and Love, feminism exists not as the event, which has vanished, or the truth which has gathered together; instead, feminism exists as the fidelity to the event itself, an intrinsic and enduring break from the negative and an inherent and persistent emphasis on the multiple. Affirming feminism's positive fidelity is a militant *Idea*. The *Idea* is tied to the event because the event manifests its possibility; 'the Idea is the general name of this new *possibility*' (Badiou 2013a: 14, *emphasis added*). It is militant in its resistance to the idea of normal desires which collapse the big *Idea* of possibility through generic naming, a simulacrum of truth. Instead, the militant idea constituting feminism's positive fidelity is its affirmation of the existence which has no name. With Badiou, feminists 'must sustain the militant idea of a desire that permanently affirms the existence of that which has no name [...] with the possibility that this kind of transformation would be local and not necessarily general or total' (2012a: 76). It is by calling together the void, or turning towards love's event-encounter with alterity, that we can navigate the field of feminist theory established by the truth matrices of Politics and Love. It is between Love and lack that feminism moves towards constituting its ethics, those principles that judge the practice of the subject, both the individual and the collective.

Love and Lack: Between Badiou and Irigaray

The theory of the subject is complete when it manages to think the structural law of the empty place as the punctual anchoring of the excess over the place.

– Badiou, *Theory of the Subject* (2013b: 261)

In the context of evolving theories of identity politics, the ethics of love operates as a counter-hegemonic framework for affective political mobilization, providing a way to “bridge across the chasm” of differences without commodifying or eliminating difference. By reclaiming “love”, or, more specifically, philosophy in the feminine, Irigaray suggests that philosophy would come to value and account for intersubjectivity, dialogue in difference, and an attention to the present moment. Irigaray focuses on how feminists could love across difference, not by reducing identity to notions of sameness, but by accounting for belonging through the recognition of the irreducible differences between us. To love across difference requires a reformulation of the central logic of Western love, transforming it from a system of desire based on possession, exchange or absorption/consumption, to one which acknowledges and respects irreducible differences. Irigaray’s *The Way of Love* contends that within contemporary philosophy and feminism ‘the Western conception of identity as unity closed upon what is one’s own, this relational dimension of the human is forgotten [...] the act of entering into relation is conceived as a relation to oneself and not as a relation to the other’ (2002: 89). Irigaray’s emphasis on ‘letting be transcendence’ positions the ontology of an ethics of love within feminism. The opportunity for a loving encounter only exists when we

recognize the irreducibility of subjectivities while realizing that these subjectivities are themselves continuously transformed through their relations with one another.

This awareness of relations between one another is complicated by feminist positionalities, which construct fidelity around the anti-. This standpoint is further complicated by the immediate antagonism of identity and modulated by persistent affective antagonisms, the traces of which remain hard to ignore. Sara Ahmed, like Badiou and Irigaray, takes difference as the point of entry in *Strange Encounters* (2000) and *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), emphasizing affective energies such as pain, hate, fear, revolt, shame, and love, as integral to a feminist and queer ethic. Feminism is formed by the anti-, it ‘involves such history of contact; feminism is shaped by what it is against, just as women’s bodies and lives may be shaped by histories of violence that bring them to a feminist consciousness’ (Ahmed 2004: 174). Despite this contact with the anti- the *eventual* response, the shape formed by resistance to what it is against, cannot take on the negative successfully by mimicking its patterns of displacement, oppression, and violence. Instead, it must transcend the stability of the anti- and take up the militant Idea.

‘A politics that is critical cannot be ‘anti’: it cannot simply ‘overcome’ through detachment the affects of histories of violence, justice, and inequality that structure the demand or hope for transformation. Emotions may be crucial to showing us why transformations are so difficult (we remain invested in what we critique), but also how they are possible (our investments move as we move).’

(Ahmed 2004: 172)

The integration of emotions within the militant Idea strengthens feminism's fidelity to Politics and Love. Bringing Badiou and Irigaray into conversation allows one to take up the militant Idea in a space of Lacanian lack through a process that always begins with two.

Badiou and Irigaray advance an ethical and communicative framework for acknowledging difference and transcending individuated identity by beginning with difference and preserving a space for which we cannot know the other. Beginning with two there is a call to the other which cannot be known, the traces of this call perforate the event-encounter. The duality of the event-encounter is always already before the anti-, before identity, it exists in both the rational and amorous, the masculine and feminine, in self and other, and all space between. It is in giving energy to this lack that feminism's ethical pluralism, and fidelity in the positive, offers new ways of being in relation to one another. It is at the event-encounter that Badiou's and Irigaray's methods of engaging difference complement but do not co-determine the militant idea of the feminine. Both Badiou and Irigaray describe the event-encounter as a communicative exchange trapped in the subject-language. Understanding the event-encounter as a communicative exchange positions feminism's positive fidelity and militant idea as an ethic of the immanent and continuing break of the event. 'If our horizon is determined by an original ability to be, it is closed. It is open if we accept that this ability to be is not received once and for all but evolves according to our relations with the other, an other

who both limits and increases our ability to be' (Irigaray 2008: 75). In this way, opening the horizon of the event-encounter is an opening of the unnamable, 'the pure real of a situation [...] The community and the collective are the unnamable of political truth (Badiou 2012b: 86).' Despite the unnamable, the subject-language's inability to name all the elements of the situation, communication persists. Communication is never angelic: no communication can ever be entirely definite, and we are destined to interpret; 'our interaction will never be a meeting of cogitos but at its best may be a dance in which we sometimes touch' (Peters 2000: 268). In this touch there is a quest for the presence of the other. The ethics of Eros – the attractions and repulsions between bodies reveal the paradox of love:

'We mortals really love only personally, and yet not to love all people is unjust. The paradox of love is its concrete boundedness and the universality of its demands. Because we can share our mortal time and touch only with some and not all, presence becomes the closest thing there is to a guarantee of a bridge across the chasm.' (Peters 2000: 271)

It is by sharing presence, engaging the truth procedures of love, that we experience *real communication*. For both Badiou and Irigaray the communication of love based on the world of difference begins with two, the masculine and the feminine. However, for both, this touch and presence is not normative or sexualized. For Irigaray, the two is integral to the human dimension and must be cultivated to create new ways of relating to the other:

‘As long as the other is not recognized and respected as a bridge between nature and culture, a bridge that gender at first is, every attempt to establish a democratic globalization will remain a moral imperative without concrete fulfilment. As long as the universal is not considered as being two, and humanity as being a place of fruitful cultural coexistence between two irreducibly different genders, a culture will never stop imposing its color and values upon another, including through its morality and religion.’ (2008: 134)

For Badiou, ‘the positions ‘man’ and ‘woman’, viewed from within love, are then generic: they have nothing to do with the empirical sex of the people engaged in the love relation’ (2013a: 61). In a tendentious claim, Badiou declares ‘Love is heterosexual’, unpacking the provocation he explains, ‘two distinct positions are always to be found within love itself, and this is the case regardless of the empirical sex of the partners’ (Badiou 2013a: 63). Against the homogeneity of identity and politics, love offers a militant idea of difference sustained by the unnamable of language, the lack in communication, the silence between the two. It is precisely because we cannot know the other that we cannot name the collective, and from this unnamable is conceived the positive fidelity to a hope that we may become something other than ourselves. That we may be committed to feminism means not that we fight against others’ fear and repression of lack, but that we take up this lack as a source of strength, that we leverage the unnamable to mobilize the transcendence of ourselves before the other to create a space that is between the two – that exists in eternal lack. This ‘taking up’ is

conceptualized differently by Badiou and Irigaray: the former emphasizes the void left by the event, while the latter illuminates the silence of language and increased sensory attention that is required to establish new ways of being in relation to the other.

For Badiou, the communication of opinions, and the language of the event-encounter, is preceded (and exceeded) by a subject-language which facilitates fidelity to truth. Even this subject-language ‘does not have the power to name all the elements of the situation. At least one real element must exist [...] At least one point that the truth cannot force (Badiou 2012b: 85).’ This is where the event-encounter bumps against its first antagonism. Because the truth is never angelic, absent messianic intervention, it is never communicable in its entirety; it always requires distortions in its forms of communication and address to the other. The logic of the event problematizes this evermore:

‘Since the event is to disappear, being a kind of flashing supplement that happens to the situation, so what is retained of it in the situation, and what serves to guide the fidelity, must be something like a trace, or a name, that refers back to the vanished event.’ (Badiou 2012b: 72)

When this name, feminism, refers to an identity or antagonism (the anti-) it is a deceit; instead, the name is only a trace that refers back to the original void left by the event, the truth. ‘When a radical break in a situation, under names borrowed from real truth-processes, convokes not the void but the “full” particularity or presumed substance of

that situation, we are dealing with a simulacrum of truth' (Badiou 2012b: 73). Badiou describes fidelity to a simulacrum in contradistinction to that of fidelity to the event; based not on the 'universality of the void' but on the 'closed particularity of an abstract set' (Badiou 2012b: 74). Here Badiou is cognizant that such a distinction is elliptical, acknowledging that in both cases fidelity to a simulacrum and fidelity to an event require naming adversaries. However, in closing the set around identity or the anti- the simulacrum subverts the true event; subsequently, the militant idea of the universal address is circumvented. It is necessary, then, to return to the subject-language and construct in ourselves a space of co-belonging:

'An individual effectively interiorizes the necessity of the other when both individuals co-belong to the same subject, to the same subject of truth. Love is the first experience of this type. There is real sharing, real communication, between the individuals incorporated within the amorous procedure, even if communication in this instance must not be understood as something rational or easy. It is itself part of the labor of love.' (Badiou 2013a: 58)

It is significant that Badiou posits communication in this framework, as part of the labor of love. Moving communication beyond the rational and into the amorous, the event-encounter is affectively energized. The power of truth to change the establish codes of communication materializes in the subject-languages efforts to convoke the void. Although Badiou has expressed a limited view of communication as 'suited only to opinions', insisting that 'the Immortal that I am capable of being cannot be spurred in

me by the effects of communicative sociality, it must be directly seized by fidelity' (Badiou 2012b: 51). Here he privileges the *real communication* induced by Love's truth procedure. This communication, an affective labor of love, 'is as exceptional as a phenomenon as truths' (Badiou 2013a: 58). It is at the juncture of the void, communication, and affect that Irigaray appears.

For Irigaray, like Badiou, the event-encounter's communication begins with lack, at the void, between the impossible chasm of sign and referent constituting the subject-language.

'Communicating, which wants to speak to the other, unfolds starting from this impossible to say [...] Speech is always turned toward the other in order to communicate and turns back to oneself without having been able to say what it had to say [...] Speech attends to what it has learned from the other but also – if it listens to that which it failed in communicating [...] The meaning that it conveys becomes deeper and richer through this communicating in which an incommunicable always remains.' (Irigaray 2002: 23)

In this way, Irigaray identifies the two inherent in communication, the call beckons a response; the same calls to an other. Building on Badiou's communicative framework, Irigaray affirms the incommunicable, *real communication* is two: speech and silence. Speech, we may understand as connected to Badiou through the object/subject-language. Silence we can approach through Badiou from the unnamable/void of the

militant idea. However, in both speech and silence, Irigaray offers important contributions to a feminist fidelity between Politics and Love. In relation to speech and language, Irigaray argues that ‘words are too often already separated from the body in which desire originates, and are thus always separating us from it, from ourselves’; despite this, ‘words are thus necessary, but so is all that which will support the sensible existence of each one in the relations between the two – which requires a sensory attention to the other’ (Irigaray 2008: 51). Alongside Badiou’s emphasis on communication as an affective labor of love, Irigaray positions self-affection, the silence to which we are to return as integral to establishing new forms of relation between the same and difference. ‘Self-affection corresponds to an art of interiority, of internalization, that we have to discover, to invent, to cultivate, and to express: in ourselves and between us (Irigaray 2008: 136).’ In this way, Irigaray’s articulation of self-affection works to provide a method with an appreciation of silence and an attention to listening. Both Badiou and Irigaray posit the self and other as in already existing worlds of two or more. For Badiou, the event, truth, and its corresponding fidelity resonate through traces that pre-exist the subject. While Badiou’s subject-object language articulation postulates the void of the militant idea the emphasis on the exceptional, *real communication*, is predicated on the already established Love between two. For Irigaray, the emphasis on silence before sharing opens the pathway to Love. Silence emerges from a lack which marks difference, but it is silence which creates the resonance of speech, silence opens the threshold between the self and other worlds.

‘What we have to speak, to say to each other, is not yet determined and will

remain undetermined in a discourse existing outside us. Thus the first world we have to speak to one another is our capacity and acceptance of being silent.’

(Irigaray 2008: 17-18)

In the world of two, where language can only act to shelter the other, silence is the venture into the void; silence is listening to the lack. The willingness to traverse the anxiety generated by the void demonstrates the ethical courage of the militant idea. The first act of communication is not the speech act, but the act of silence. This is a significant dualism, one frequently dismissed by scholars of communication and rhetoric who frequently begin with the persuasive act as exemplar and meaning, or even in some cases as truth. With Irigaray, the first act is of listening to the silence, ‘listening to oneself or, more exactly, to the relation between that which has touched us and that which we have in reserve for answering to this experience’ (Irigaray 2008: 21). Before we can love, we must listen. Before Badiou’s emphasis on *real communication* and Love as a truth procedure, Irigaray’s double listening (to self and other) opens the space where one can approach the other.

In the current of contemporary feminism the roar of subject particularities makes it difficult to distinguish the silence of collective lack. Centered around the anti-, and organized in relation to identity, feminist particularities generate consensus around the negative in a way that obscures discussion of feminism’s fidelity in the positive. In addition to challenging the problematic differentials of capitalism, resisting systemic

structures of patriarchy, refusing acceptance of racism, and working against legacies of colonialism, feminists have circulated the militant idea. Within each particularity of feminism is a different subject of feminism, a different truth of feminism; however, there remains a positive feminist fidelity in the ethic of the two. The persuasive act does not mark the origins of the event; beginning with two, the event begins with the possibility for the militant idea. In believing there is a positive possibility for the world, which as yet has no name, a feminist ethic creates an opening where we may begin with silence. Instead of beginning with sameness, a declaration as one – a manifesto, we might begin with otherness. In recognition of our capacity to be with others we state our solidarity as an effort to establish our common ground. Understood this way, a declaration of solidarity serves to speak our capacity to be silent to the other. It serves not to welcome them, to assimilate them into the world of the self, but to recognize the world of the other and contribute towards building our commonality – our collectivity in the void:

‘Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feeling, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground.’ (Ahmed 2004: 189)

A feminist ethic must listen in such a way as to hear the voices of other feminists and recognize that this may lead to a ‘politics of discomfort’. Ahmed encourages feminist scholars to ‘stay open to feminism’ and to ‘keep the objects of feminism alive’ by which

she means to critique the world, which we face in the present, ‘and to encounter the objects of feminism anew, as that hope for the “not yet”, in the here and the now’ (2004: 187).

Solidarity: Between the Same and Difference

To make a declaration of love is to move on from the event-encounter to embark on a construction of truth.

– Badiou, *In Praise of Love* (2012c, p. 42).

The contemporary contexts of neoliberalism and globalization are increasingly bringing ideologically and geographically distinct organizations into activist coalitions. ‘Politically, coalition refers to unions, fusions, and combinations designated for certain kinds of action. Often coalitions are understood as temporary and goal-oriented, and not requiring permanent incorporation into one body (Chavez 2013: 7).’ Critical and feminist scholars have been instrumental in illuminating the power differentials of counter-hegemonic collectivities. Transnational feminists have problematized connections between the local and global to reveal the systemic and structural sources of privilege and oppression. As feminist coalitions form between what has traditionally been conceptualized as the Western World and the Third World scholars are challenged to transcend their embedded positionality. Recognizing the privilege of positionality, Mohanty (2002) reorients the subject-language devices of Western and Third World

feminists, conceptualizing the One-Third/Two-Thirds Worlds, Mohanty draws attention to the inseparable relationship of feminist positionality and argues for a ‘cross-national feminist solidarity and organizing against capitalism’ (2002: 509). Viewed as part of a larger coalition, feminists are challenged to recognize and transcend their divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on. ‘To the extent that identification requires sameness, this coalition is impossible. So, the coalition requires that we conceive identification anew (Lugones 2003: 85).’ These coalitional exigencies require scholars to recast models of identity politics, discourse ethics, and group subjectivity/agency. Valuing solidarity statements I seek to locate feminism’s fidelity in an ethic which theorizes its discursive potential for coalitional building.

Social movement scholars frequently analyze the outward discourses of counter-publics. Rhetoricians understand the outward discourses of social movements in the form of protest messages, campaigns, and appeals directed at the general public and their opposition. Seeking to understand ‘counter-publics enclaves’ scholars have prioritized their strategies of organization and resistance as a unified and frequently disempowered acting body (Fraser 1992; Warner 1999). These models of social movement studies have been widely applied and risk containing feminist rhetoricians’ analyses of social movements. Conceptualized as organizations, these scholars understand social movements as a singular discursive entity; the resulting scholarship prioritizes analysis of the counter-public’s campaign as directed towards members of the broader public. An emphasis on outward discourses risks obfuscating or ignoring internal discourses. Prior

to mobilizing the public, social movements organize, communicate, and create coalitional advocacy. The process of organizing coalitions among diverse activist interests is uniquely communicative; ‘Communication is about the constitution of relationships, the revelation of otherness, or the breaking of the shells that encase the self (Peters 2000: 17).’ Shifting analysis towards the internal discourses of coalitional organizing offers rhetoricians new theories of political identity, subjectivity, and agency.

The formation of activist advocacy coalitions is contingent upon an *eventual* moment that moves towards the constitution of new relationships. This moment is both temporal and ethical. Hyde (2012) describes such moments as *openings* predicated on rhetorical ethos:

Ethos develops with the use of discourse to construct places, domains for social and political action, where a knowing-together can happen, where we cultivate our moral character, and where the open society of democracy can be promoted out of respect for the voices and opinions of others.’ (Hyde 2012: 71)

Rarely are social movements composed of single organizations. Social movements are complex coalitional constructions which often exist as physical sites of organization and ideological locations of activism. The outward discourses of counter-publics mark the boundaries of their temporal and ideological sites; but it is those internal discourses which constitute the ethic of collectivity and community that unite the coalition. Shifting our focus from outward counter-public discourses to internal analyses of coalitional

eventual openings, feminist scholars may theorize the politics of ethics and emotions in feminist coalitional organizing and activism. Towards these ends, feminists may seek to advance new critical frameworks of invitation, constitution, and identification that transcend the same, begin with two, and enable difference.

For social movement scholars, the organization of diverse collectivities presents a unique exigency; as feminists, environmentalists, and socialists collaborate with other counter-hegemonic movements they risk obscuring their movements' ethic(s) for the coalition's broader vision. 'Theorists of social movements, even those who have shown an interest in the identity question, haven't developed a more comprehensive notion of identity with the multiple, diverse, and plural reality of identities nowadays (Gonzalez 2008: 25).' Theorizing coalitional collectivity requires: first, acknowledging silence, second, speaking our capacity to be second, and third, listening. There can be no monolithic theory of feminist coalitional collectivity. By challenging existing scholarship and creating new forms of identification, subjectivity, and agency this epistemological project moves us towards understanding how feminist activists connect to, and resonate with, other social movements while still retaining their ideological commitments.

Coalitional solidarity is not an exclusive feature of identity politics in the movement; solidarity does not establish outward rhetorical appeals. Instead, solidarity frames an internal reflective, communicative, and affective 'we':

'Neither ontological nor teleological, this internally designated, communicative

“we” does not deny that term “we” often refers to a relationship among a limited number of members. Instead, it stresses the possibility of an inclusive understanding of “we” whereby the strength of the bond connecting us stems from our mutual recognition of each other instead of from our exclusion of someone else.’ (Dean 1996: 31)

An analysis of internal social movement discourses seeks to explicate the *eventual* openings created by coalitional moments. Understanding the communicative implications of love as a radical political project reveals the potential for collective subjectivities and agential ethics and norms. Feminist scholars should use this ethical-communicative framework of acknowledging silence, speaking our capacity to be silent, and listening to resist the simulacrum of truth, the naming of political ideals (norms and ethics) which position some feminists as ‘hosts’ and others as ‘strangers’ (Ahmed 2004). Conceptualizing love as a radical political and discursive framework for acknowledging difference, engaging ethics, and transcending individuated identity allows us to turn towards locating those *eventual* sources of invention which may engender coalitional moments.

I contend that it is a critical time for social movement scholars to begin to trace those ethical and affective attachments which unite increasingly coalitional social movements. As sites of textual analysis, solidarity statements function as sources of rhetorical coalitional invention. While often understood as statements positioning a counter-public

in resistance to the public, solidarity statements may better be understood as statements positioning relations of identification among a coalition. Analyzing solidarity statements as internal discourses integral to the organization and collaboration of diverse activist coalitions reveals new forms of identification and collective agency. Politically such texts mark the boundaries of publics and counter publics. Internally, solidarity statements are visceral and excessive in form, style, and content. Tracing the affective attachments of solidarity statements from the third space I argue for an ethical-communicative framework of analysis which inverts the individuated ethic of identity politics and moves towards the collectivistic ethic of reflective solidarity, of silence and listening as the beginning of the speech act. If social movement scholars continue an exclusive focus on those outward discourses of counter-publics they will risk ignoring those potential positive collaborations which redefine identity, establish collective agency, and constitute coalitional subjectivity.

Conclusion

Trying to construct, or deconstruct, claims towards a collectivistic feminist ethic is not without its problematic potentials. Analyzing feminist ethics of solidarity requires a critical engagement with the histories and affective attachments of feminist identity politics. In the terrain of shifting feminist identity theory/activism/coalitions the Combahee River Collective's (1977) *A Black Feminist Statement* serves as an early exemplar. Despite encouraging coalition building with other feminisms, the Combahee

River Collective retains a limited collective ethic: ‘a solidarity around the fact of race’ (118). These coalitions of identity politics are trapped in their identity markers. Alliances are raced, classed, and gendered as identity difference contains the potential of solidarity and collectivity. Alcoff’s (1988) analysis of the *Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory* argues against totalizing constructions of identity politics. Predicated on an ethic of women’s identity essence she argues that feminists risk solidifying the belief in an innate “womanhood” to which all women can be compared. Holding onto the value of identity and responding to the post-structuralist obsession with subjectivity Alcoff (1988) contends that post-structuralist feminisms risk collapsing into a ‘thesis of undecidability’ which undermines efforts to resist misogynist discourse. Advocating for a concept of positionality Alcoff (1988) reinvigorates an ethic of relational fluidity which promotes feminist networking and coalition building. Alcoff (1988) argues for a concept of identity politics informed by a pluralist subjectivity. This concept of positionality is informed by a fluid historical context and suggests that identities are both ‘subjects of and subjected to social construction’ (Alcoff 1988: 146). Importantly, this conception of identity politics moves away from a static definition of identity and towards a recognition of a network of intersectional relations. In this way feminist politics can argue not just for negation or contestation of fixed identities, but also for increased mobility and radical change, for the fluidity of identity in politics.

Despite *intersectionality’s* more recent theoretical innovation and radical conceptualization of identity, subjectivity, and agency, its explanatory power is waning in light of increasing

coalitional organizing. Though intersectionality expands the potential of coalitional organizing among various identity categories it does not adequately describe the ethical inner-relations among the very categories it reifies. Socialist feminists have explicated difficulties to leverage an intersectional framework within activist critiques of capitalism, ‘the strategic challenge is to actually implement a political discourse and organizing practice that is not only intersectional but also moves toward a critique of capitalism and the necessity of an alternative’ (Brenner & Holmstrom 2014: 280). The challenge to link intersectional identities to activist political coalitions is exacerbated by internal tensions, ideological confrontations, and conceptual disagreements.

Recognizing the embedded nature of these differences transnational feminists are problematizing identity and complicating intersectionality’s categorical conception of identity. Weir’s (2013) transnational analysis of feminist identities in relation to constructions of freedom seeks to transcend intersectionality, arguing that we need to move towards:

‘An understanding of identities as sites of multiple and contested and conflicting (and not just interlocking) relations of various kinds, including not only relations of subjection and subjugation but also relations of recognition and identification, of flourishing, of meaning, of love, of empowerment, of solidarity.’ (18)

Emphasizing ethics and recognizing diverse conceptions of freedom and resistance Weir (2013) problematizes static identity politics and moves towards an affective analysis of power whereby diverse relations of meaning, love, and solidarity inform identity. However, such terms remain largely undefined or contested in existing feminist theorizing. It is in this void surrounding the missing subject-language that Badiou's militant idea and affective *real communication* join with Irigaray's silence and listening to punctuate the void. Between Politics and Love is a fidelity to feminism in the positive, an ethic that posits a beginning with difference and an infinite alterity.

Rather than conceptualizing feminist norms as always in resistance we should seek to understand the feminist ethic which unites diverse projects. As feminists join diverse coalitions the discursive process of negotiating and establishing connections can be understood as a process of engaging in strategic relations of power. The coalition is positioned as a way to rethink the politics of collective identity, social subjectivity, and organizational agency. Between the normative rationalist and radical utopian discourses lies the potential for coalitional action. Marked by its in-betweenness in space and its multitudinal subjectivity, a coalition does not define an existing relationship but instead emphasizes the radical possibility for the coming together of new relationships. In this way feminist coalitional work and coalitional moments are vital for constructing alternative imaginaries and new political strategies.

The resulting coalitional solidarity is not an exclusive feature of identity politics in the

movement; solidarity does not establish outward rhetorical appeals. Instead, solidarity frames an internal reflective, communicative, and affective 'we'. Understanding the communicative implications of love as a radical political project reveals the potential for collective subjectivities and agential ethics and norms. By engaging and extending love as a radical political project to an analysis of coalitional agency theorists may conceptualize new ways of being in relation with the other, new rhetorical appeals to solidarity, and new sites of discourse analysis.

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