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What are you reading?

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Reviews by:

Anne-Sophie Bafort, Marthe Claeys, Katelijne Malomgré, Emma Moormann, Anna Ropianytk,

1

García, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

In their book *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education*, Ofelia García and Li Wei explore the theoretical underpinnings of translanguaging, a sociolinguistic concept that eschews traditional conceptualizations of languages as bounded systems or entities. The book poses two questions: how a translanguaging lens reconstructs traditional views of language and bilingualism, and how translanguaging invites changes in education. In response, García and Wei emphasize that language and education are key to transcending traditional views of languages as determined entities.

Circumventing traditional approaches in linguistics, García and Wei focus on specific practices by people with varying linguistic repertoires. They prioritize the study of languages based on their use rather than their formal structures. From this premise, centered on speakers' ability to select linguistic features on the basis of their communicative needs, the approach highlights the complex nature of interactions between individuals with varying historical, cultural, and social backgrounds. As such, García and Wei's understanding of translanguaging liberates speakers from being confined to making meaning in the traditional monolingual or additive bilingual sense by redefining language in a way that better mirrors the sociolinguistic realities of everyday life. This has been substantiated by educational research, which shows monolingual practices in multilingual settings to have a limiting or even restrictive effect on students' ability to fully express themselves. In addition to transforming our overall understanding of language and natural language use, translanguaging thus also poses as an opportunity for educational structures to let go of monolingual strictures.

The approach García and Wei advocate has particular transformative potential for (multilingual) educational settings. It encourages the implementation of an overarching translanguaging pedagogy and specific translanguaging strategies. Various strategies for teaching and learning through translanguaging are described in the book, which the authors believe can provide the necessary linguistic flexibility for students who currently find themselves limited and underrepresented in monoglossic curricula where certain languages are privileged over others. Consequently, the authors emphasize the positive impact translanguaging might have in contemporary learning environments, often populated by many students from migrant and multilingual backgrounds. Adopting translanguaging as a pedagogy in schools, they argue,

activates all students' linguistic repertoires and backgrounds. These practices benefit learning in a narrow sense by providing equitable education and equal access to the curriculum for all students through building on their linguistic strengths. But they have merits in a broad sense too: translanguaging entails the acknowledgement of students' complete linguistic repertoires, not only languages preferred by monolingual policies or ideologies. The latter entails letting go of the strict separation of languages through which students in turn are separated among themselves, and thus, limits the risk of alienation.

Although the authors demonstrate the importance and value of translanguaging in the mediation of complex social and cognitive activities, they note that it is seldom employed as a pedagogy in practice at this time. Consequently, few empirical studies have addressed translanguaging in practice. This discrepancy has motivated me to focus on educational institutions with multilingual practices as a space to empirically engage the theoretical concept of translanguaging. Specifically, I look at international schools, an educational setting that was introduced to meet the need for a transnational form of education for expatriate families around the globe. My research demonstrates that, contrary to international schools' popular image, these schools are not always prestigiously monoglossic. Rather, they are situated on a continuum from fully monoglossic to schools where translanguaging in some way is the norm. That is, some international schools are more monolingual in nature, but many of these schools recognize the value of multilingual practices in education and actively attempt to embrace translanguaging – consciously or not – in their language policies and practices. These insights are a starting point for further linguistic ethnographic research into the nature of this elitist form of education. International schools could namely be seen as further expanding the gap between more and less privileged people through these reported 'best practices' and through their reported creation of multilingual and multicultural global citizens. At the same time, however, the multilingual practices which international schools' prestigious nature and financial situation enable, might prove valuable to submit to thorough linguistic ethnographic or pragmatic observation.

While García and Wei's work has been useful for my personal research, it holds relevance for the field of diversity studies on a more general level because it encourages a full expression of linguistic diversity in already-diverse educational environments. The work challenges the reader to reflect on the social implications of personal language use and on how the conceptualization of language can be directly related to inequality, with a clear-cut and thoroughly illustrated new conceptualization at the ready.

Anne-Sophie Bafort

Anne-Sophie Bafort holds a Master of Arts in English and Scandinavian Linguistics and Literature from Ghent University. Anne-Sophie is currently a research staff member on an interuniversity FWO Covid-19 project (Ghent University and the University of Antwerp) focused on optimizing interactional dynamics and pragmatic awareness in Covid-19 contact tracing telephone interactions (ConTra-C19). Her research interests are situated in the field of sociolinguistics, more specifically in the topics of language policy, multilingualism and education.

2

Manne, K. (2017). *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, Kate Manne addresses common perceptions of the concept “misogyny”, demonstrating that it is much more entrenched and pervasive than generally understood. According to Manne, people often understand misogyny simply as woman-hating, but in *Down Girl*, she argues against that psychological notion of misogyny, as it fails to capture the entirety of misogyny as a structural mechanism of punishment and reward that polices and enforces gendered role-division (p. xiv). She explains that misogyny is a natural feature of a patriarchal society rather than an accidental conviction of individuals, and its purpose is to preempt and control the behavior of both men and women. Misogyny’s effectiveness is twofold: it lies both in the associated threat of hostile consequences when one violates or challenges the gendered norms, and in the promise of reward when one upholds these norms.

Manne devotes a chapter of the book to the distinction between sexism and misogyny—two words which are often conflated (p. 78). Her structural approach to misogyny allows us to see how both concepts—sexism and misogyny—fulfill distinct functions in a patriarchal society. Where misogyny polices and enforces gendered norms by mechanisms of reward and punishment, sexism is the branch of a patriarchal ideology that justifies and rationalizes that social order. Throughout the book, Manne provides a number of real-life examples as predictable manifestations of the ‘logic’ of misogyny, including the Isla Vista shootings, the political and personal criticisms towards Hilary Clinton, and the inappropriately mild repercussions for sexual predators on American campuses, for which Manne coins the word ‘himpathy’ (p. 196). Manne provides the reader a lens through which to view these cases in a new light, exposing them as natural manifestations of misogyny in a patriarchal system.

My own research focuses on the moral dimensions of pride and the way we evaluate expressions of pride, ranging from the momentous pride one feels for achieving some desired accomplishment, to the pride one feels and celebrates in regard to general traits like sexual orientation, group identity, or nationality. Manne’s work has influenced me to think about the moral evaluation of this emotion. Whether we perceive pride as arrogant and vile or strong and empowering, this perception cannot occur without taking into account gendered expectations of who is allowed to feel pride.

In her work, Manne elaborates on several examples where similar behavior is assessed differently depending on the gender of the agent. Through what she calls the give/take model (p. 130), Manne describes how we expect women to give goods like attention, care, affection, sex, emotional and reproductive labor. Men, on the other hand, are expected to take and receive goods like status, power, attention, recognition, and wealth. In this model, it is logical that society responds in hostile ways and with suspicion when a woman seeks to take, especially if what she takes is a masculine-coded good like attention or recognition.

This aspect of Manne’s work is insightful for my research because it sheds light on how and why we might come to different moral evaluations of similar expressions of pride depending on the perceived gender of the proud agent. Pride, following Manne’s model, would be a masculine-coded good, for it is an emotion that lays claim to value, and often seeks to establish external recognition. Pride takes. Manne’s give/take model explains why a proud woman, or for that matter any other social group that is not expected to ‘take’, is considered greedy, arrogant, demanding, and out of line; whereas a man expressing pride is considered ambitious, strong, and to be taking what is rightfully his. It is crucial that I, as a researcher, am aware of my own gendered biases when coming to a nuanced understanding of pride. Furthermore, this insight allows me to highlight how and why expressing, or even experiencing, pride might be differently perceived and have specific repercussions for different demographics.

Manne's book is a valuable tool to aid in understanding mechanisms of gendered oppression and why they are so persistent. Manne calls misogyny a 'self-masking problem' (xix, 23, 281) precisely because addressing it is the kind of defiance that is predictably met with backlash and hostility. She leaves the reader uncertain as to where and how to begin a near-impossible task, but the perspective the book awakens is impossible to step back from. Manne's work is a valuable contribution not only to the field of gender studies, but also to the contemporary context in which pride is used as a banner for protest and met with different responses, ranging from Black Pride in the now-global Black Lives Matter movement to the Proud Boys in the contemporary U.S political context. Manne's book thus offers a critical framework with which to think about and engage with contemporary issues extending well beyond the concept of misogyny in isolation.

Martha Claeys

Martha Claeys is affiliated with Centre for Ethics and the Centre for European Philosophy at the University of Antwerp. As a PhD candidate, she is a fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO). In her doctoral thesis, she explores the moral dimensions of pride. She has an MA from the University of Antwerp and from the University of Chicago. She hosts and produces the philosophical podcast [Kluwen](#).

3

Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

It is a long-standing truism in Western feminist theory that gender is not a biologically determined fact, but rather a social construct. In *The Invention of Women*, Oyèwùmí takes matters one step further: she argues that a gendered approach to the world is a typically Western invention and that gender as such need not be constructed at all. In other words, not only the content of what a certain gender category entails, is intimately connected to sociocultural and historical factors, but also whether or not any given society has the very concept of gender as a relevant category for social organization, is a matter of contingency. Gender is neither universal nor necessary, and there is a dangerous perversion in assuming otherwise.

To illustrate the particularity of a gender divided worldview, Oyèwùmí contrasts the dominant Western frame with that of the precolonial Yorùbá culture. As the author shows, the former is obsessed with visual bodily characteristics and uses a certain kind of 'bio-logic' to classify every individual upon birth within one of two rigid and mutually exclusive gender categories. Based on this classification, far-reaching assumptions are then made about social roles appropriate for each individual. The Old Yorùbá culture, on the other hand, considered not gender, but relative age to be the foundation of social organization. Social roles were highly fluid, and, in every interaction, individuals were supposed to behave differently according to their relational position in regard to other social agents. Meanwhile, society as a whole remained entirely gender free: instead of being merely gender neutral, gender as a concept did not exist in Old Yorùbá. This changed, however, with the colonial invasion: European occupiers not only brought enslavement, disruption, and mass atrocities, but also a gendered worldview and, along with it, racist heteropatriarchy.

What makes *The Invention of Women* an important publication for my own philosophical research on conceptual ethics and feminist debates concerning gender concepts, is its critical in-depth analysis of the power of language in shaping our reality. Oyěwùmí argues that the process of imposing gender on Yorùbá culture did not end with the retreat of the colonial forces, but rather continues through an ongoing Western discursive imperialism that systematically erases both Yorùbá particularity and the voices of those individuals that Western discourse calls ‘women’. Time and again, Western scholars and writers keep mistaking ungendered words of the Yorùbá language such as *aláàfin* (ruler) for the masculine form ‘king’ (pp. 87-91), and unwarrantedly assume gender dynamics to be self-evident and universal. Western feminism too is guilty of doing the same harm if it takes for granted that gender and the oppression of women are timeless and transhistorical phenomena and, moreover, if it fails to acknowledge the Western culpability in imposing patriarchy, for instance, on the Yorùbá society.

In this respect, Oyěwùmí’s book sets an example in introducing ethical considerations into conceptual matters and shows how the critical investigation of language plays an important role in breaking the chain of reproducing injustice. It is an invitation to the debunking of ideological presuppositions and a reminder that feminist theory will be both intersectional and context sensitive or it will not be at all. More than twenty years after its first publication, *The Invention of Women* remains a powerful, thought-provoking, and, unfortunately, still much-needed masterpiece.

Katelijne Malomgré

Katelijne Malomgré is a PhD researcher in philosophy at the University of Antwerp’s Centre for Ethics. Her research draws on conceptual ethics and intersectional feminist theory and focuses specifically on the issue of discussing social injustice while avoiding the reproduction of this injustice in linguistic practice.

4

Kittay, E.F., & Kittay, L. B. (2000). On the Expressivity and Ethics of Selective Abortion for Disability: Conversations with my Son. In E. Parens, A. Asch (Eds.), *The Ethics of Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights: A Report from the Hastings Center* (pp. 196-214). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

‘Does the decision to abort after diagnosis of disability signal the devaluation of the life of a person with disabilities?’ This complicated question is the topic of an email exchange between feminist philosopher Eva Feder Kittay and her son Leo, a philosophy major. The exchange was published as a book chapter titled *On the Expressivity and Ethics of Selective Abortion for Disability: Conversations with my Son*. When discussing the issue of selective abortion, Kittay combines more traditional, bioethical insights with her own perspective as a feminist, an analytic philosopher, and a mother of a disabled daughter. She argues that the choice to continue or to terminate a pregnancy must always be the woman’s to make. Whether this decision is informed by a prenatal diagnosis of disability or not does not influence her stance, although she admits that making such a decision is even more poignant in such cases (p. 173). Often, reasons to abort involve reasons not to assume the burden of raising a child, which is a very heavy burden for mothers of disabled children in a patriarchal, ableist society. But even though Kittay emphasizes the autonomy of the woman, she seems to agree with her son that, in such a society, some reasons

for not choosing a future as a parent of a disabled child are better, or more informed, than others. She is less concerned than her son, Leo, about the potential message selective abortion might send to existing disabled people or would-be siblings, but they both hope that such a decision would not be motivated by ableist assumptions about the value of a disabled person's life or of raising a disabled child (pp. 178-179). The focus of this conversation with Leo comes back in Kittay's more recent work, which strives to complicate the implicit assumption of disability as a negative type of difference; still a pervasive assumption in our contemporary public and philosophical discourse. In *Learning From My Daughter* (2019) she explains how her disabled daughter inspired her to challenge long-held philosophical beliefs about what it means to live a good life, the importance of cognitive abilities, and the value of independence.

The tension present in Kittay's work has been thematized by a growing number of contemporary scholars writing about disability. I aim to take up this crucial challenge in my own research on epigenetics and responsibility. Findings in epigenetics, the field of biology that studies molecular mechanisms that influence how and when genes are expressed, have implications for our thinking about health and justice. My work studies possible models and principles to divide responsibility for our health, as well as the health of future generations, since epigenetic changes may also be heritable. In doing so, I inevitably enter the field of tension explored by Kittay and others. While I agree with research that highlights the negative impact of pollution by corporations, I also contend that the cause and definition of harm in these instances is not entirely straightforward. Among the harmful results of our society's unreasonably high, and thus stress-inducing, expectations on women are the potential adverse health effects of such influences on future generations. This tension has led me to opt for a two-pronged research approach: instead of exclusively focusing on how agents can remedy the harms they have caused, which is a backward-looking focus, I also explore what it means to say that all of us, as members of an unjust society, are to some extent responsible for ensuring moral and political progress regarding issues such as women's rights and disability rights. This means that all relevant moral agents in a society share a forward-looking collective responsibility for these problems and their potential solutions.

Eva and Leo Kittay's exchange may remind us of the fact that complex ethical issues, such as selective abortion, always benefit from an intersectional analysis that takes in elements of class, race and disability, as well as gender. The piece also demonstrates the value of understanding the personal as political through the integration of their first-hand experiences in their arguments. As a result, their conversation urges researchers in the fields of both gender and diversity studies to view disability through multifaceted theoretical and methodological lenses.

Emma Moormann

Emma Moormann is a PhD Researcher at the University of Antwerp. She holds a master's degree in philosophy (KU Leuven) and a teaching degree (KU Leuven). In her research she looks to apply models of intellectual and collective responsibility to normative issues arising from research in epigenetics and neurodevelopmental conditions. Her research is part of the ERC-funded project NeuroEpigenEthics (grant agreement No. 804881). Her other research interests include philosophy of education and anarchist theory.

5

Peumans, W. (2018). *Queer Muslims in Europe: Sexuality, religion and migration in Belgium*. London: IB Tauris.

Wim Peumans' *Queer Muslims in Europe* explores the often-overlooked intersection of sexuality, religion, and migration in Belgium. In his empirical research, Peumans carefully deconstructs stereotypical assumptions about the impossibility of queer Muslim existence and contests the idea of migration to a romanticized country of freedom as a linear process. Central to the book are the stories of queer men and women from a Muslim background who are so-called second and third generation migrants as well as those who were forced to relocate primarily because of their sexuality. Counter to a common view of Muslims as a homogenous group, Peumans demonstrates both how diverse this community is and how varied the relationships with Islam are.

The book begins with a thorough analysis of the complex Belgian context manifested by the country's colonial past, its status as the heart of Europe, and its geographical location at the border of Roman and Germanic Europe. These aspects create fertile soil for the growing anti-Muslim discourse. This introduction provides the reader with a better understanding of the environment in which queer Muslims have to navigate heteronormative and homonormative expectations and values. Importantly, Peumans draws upon the dissimilarities that exist between different generations of migrants and stresses the significant impact of the migration process on the ways one's sexuality is negotiated in kin relationships. A significant part of the analysis also revolves around the concept of moral breakdown between one's religion and sexuality, which plays a pivotal role in the lives of queer Muslims.

Peumans takes a critical stance on the idealized image of Belgium as a country of freedom, exposing the problematic nature of this understanding. He points out that even though the Belgian state offers elaborate legal protection of LGBTIQ community, including the possibility to apply for asylum on the ground of sexual orientation and gender identity, not all queer migrants are necessarily always aware of these protections. Some of them may not even know where they have arrived after a long precarious journey. On the other hand, there are cases when queer asylum seekers decide to change the grounds of their application, fearing possible implications for their safety and the effects on relationships with their kin. Peumans demonstrates how the experiences of queer asylum seekers are inevitably informed and shaped by gender, class, religion, race and/or age. He is also critical of the imposition of a Eurocentric model of coming out, which is routinely expected to be performed by a queer asylum seeker as a precondition for a positive decision together with the expectations of the systematic public display of the claimant's sexuality. In doing so, he explains how such an approach prioritizes a Western model and demonstrates ignorance of the social and cultural context of the claimant's country of departure, resulting in a discourse on illegitimate bodies.

Queer Muslims in Europe provides the reader with valuable insights on the intersection of sexuality, religion, and migration and sheds important light on the aspects of gender and diversity, which are often overlooked in studies of this kind. It helps sharpen a critical intersectional lens and encourages self-reflexivity in research. Because it centers on the Belgian context, this work also contributes an indispensable nuance to queer migration studies that is still heavily focused on the countries of North America, the UK, and Australia. It thus stimulates further empirical research in this field since the context of Belgium is particularly important due to its complexity, the existing hegemonic ideologies concerning the denial of race and racism, and the rising popularity of extreme-wing political parties in Flanders at the time when the reception centers in Belgium have been reaching its capacities.

Anna Ropianyk

Anna Ropianyuk is an MA student in Gender and Diversity at Ghent University. She has obtained a BA degree in English Philology and an MA degree in English Translation from Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine. Her current research is focused on the lived experiences of queer asylum seekers at the reception centers in Belgium, investigating the factors that influence their decision to (not) come out.

6

Wekker, G. (2016). *White innocence: Paradoxes of colonialism and race*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

In *White Innocence*, Gloria Wekker explores the paradoxical nature of Dutch culture: the passionate denial of racial discrimination and colonial violence coexisting alongside aggressive racism and xenophobia. Through her work, Wekker accesses a cultural archive built up over 400 years of colonial rule in order to challenge the dominant narrative of the Netherlands as a small, gentle, ‘color blind’, and tolerant nation. Her deconstruction of the dominant self-image of innocence reveals a carefully polished but harmful fantasy.

The arguments are carefully built, drawing on postcolonial critique, intersectional thought, critical race theory, and autoethnography. In her interdisciplinary approach, she combines both historical and contemporary evidence, leading to insights that uncover paradoxical aspects of Dutch society. The opposition that exists between the self-conceptualization of the Dutch as “innocent” and the violence of a colonial past is difficult for the blind white ego to fully come to terms with and to accept.

The act of confronting individuals with the realities of a violent past should logically seek to undermine this sense of innocence, but as Wekker’s work demonstrates, erosion of this innocence, for example when the self-image is confronted with the Dutch imperial presence, does not automatically lead to a sense of guilt, remorse or culpability. In contrast, it can actually evoke racist violence, and often results in the continuing concealment, and thus preservation of structural racism. Confrontation with the workings of race in this way often leads to utterances of fragility, defensiveness, and hostility from white facets of society. This process shows how white privilege works to preserve the mechanisms that allow it to function: the invisibility and unnameability of systemic racism, and the normalization and naturalization of whiteness.

To illustrate how this denial of racism and the expression of ‘innocence’ safeguards white privilege, Wekker considers the Dutch media’s portrayal of black women and men, contemporary conservative politics, and the controversies surrounding the folkloric character Black Pete. Wekker furthermore discusses the intersectional framework that lies beneath the deeply ingrained attitudes and emotions that perpetuate racism. She condemns the lack of knowledge about race in Dutch academia, specifically noting the lack of intersectionality in gender studies.¹

While Wekker is considered to be an anthropologist and queer theorist, *White Innocence* provides useful concepts for the field of philosophy as well. It has encouraged me to add an interdisciplinary dimension to my use of the philosophical concept ‘love’, and my research on how ‘love’ can function within a contemporary intersectional feminist perspective. In my research, I focus on philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch, who, in her work *The Sovereignty of Good* (2013), has argued that the ‘fat relentless ego’ is morality’s enemy (p. 51). Wekker’s analysis of the Dutch ego functions as an extensive illustration of the workings of the ego and the moral need to look beyond it. While she is engaged in a descriptive project of the invisibility and

normality of whiteness, I am interested in a normative theory of how to fight this invisibility, the dominant white perspective and the ignorance of its ego.

According to Murdoch, we are too focused on our own desires, needs and thoughts, and too often engage in self-serving fantasies. By looking beyond our ego, however, engaging in the practice of loving attention, we focus our attention outside ourselves and come to recognize others' experiences. I argue that 'love' or 'really looking' as Murdoch calls it, can be a feminist methodology, exposing overlooked experiences of marginalized people. Privileged blindness, as discussed in Wekker's work, functions to uphold oppressive structures. A moral practice of 'loving attention' actively combats such blindnessⁱⁱ by not focussing on ourselves, but attending to the experiences of others beyond the (white dominant) group that we might belong to. People who are not aware of their privileges or general dominance in society might raise their own awareness through practicing 'loving attention' and thus dismantle the normality of whiteness that Wekker refers to. For example, white feminists might come to realize through loving attention that they have ignored black women's experiences which has often resulted in a one-dimensional feminism that benefits white women only. Loving attention could be the way in which feminists can acknowledge differences between women, which black feminists such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Kimberly Crenshaw and Gloria Wekker have argued is so important.

White Innocence was received in the Netherlands with much hostility: many critiqued Wekker for being 'unscientific' and 'ignorant of Dutch culture', specifically in relation to the Black Pete tradition and its 'real history'. These supposedly methodological and epistemological critiques are actually grounded in ignorance of the dominant group, thus precisely illustrating Wekker's point that white privilege ensures the preservation of the invisibility and normality of whiteness. However, if the people who expressed these critiques had looked beyond their self-serving fantasies of Dutch culture as non-racist and had focused on the reality outside themselves, actively seeing its racist structures, it would be less likely that they would engage in such hostile critiques.

White Innocence is important for all researchers in the field of gender and diversity studies because it encourages intersectional thought and gives tangible examples of how the mechanisms we study play out beyond the abstract academic sphere. Furthermore, as the book's reception in the Netherlands demonstrates, the confrontation with systems from which people are perhaps benefitting creates an important discomfort. The book demonstrates how systems are connected and how individuals seek to uphold a whole structure of systems from which they might benefit, whether this is deliberate or not. Reading Wekker's work and the willingness to feel this discomfort is essential for every academic who strives to dismantle harmful structures in both life and academia itself.

Lotte Spreeuwenberg

Lotte Spreeuwenberg is a doctoral candidate for the FWO at the Centre for Ethics, University of Antwerp in Belgium. Her research project 'Against the fat relentless ego: love at the centre of morality' investigates whether and how Iris Murdoch's concept of loving attention can be used within a contemporary, practical and feminist perspective, focusing on feminist ethics and feminist epistemology. She obtained an MA in Philosophy of Science and Society at Tilburg University and has taught social studies and civics at the vocational level.

7

Scott, J. (1998). *Only paradoxes to offer: French feminists and the rights of man*. Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press.

Joan Scott in her book, *Only paradoxes to offer*, provides an alternative reading of the history of the progressive advancement of the ideas underpinning the French Revolution. In her work, Scott argues against a teleological narrative of ever-increasing progress towards the elimination of racial and sexual inequalities. Although citizenship was conceptualised as the right of all humanity during the age of the Democratic Revolutions of the late eighteenth century, women's biological difference from men, namely their bodies' reproductive capacities, was used to explain their status as 'dependent' and to justify the limits posed on the universality of civil rights. These references to the categorical differences between women and men made it impossible for feminists to effectively challenge the ideology of sexual difference that had gained currency throughout the Enlightenment.

The title of Scott's book, taken from Revolutionary feminist Olympe de Gouges, is a direct reference to the debates on citizenship and political rights of the late eighteenth century. It describes the paradox faced by feminist activists who entered into debates on women's rights at the time. They were confronted with an impossible challenge: to argue for the irrelevance of differences between women and men while at the same time invoking their difference from men to claim rights on behalf of this social group. Scott further contends that the contradiction between the categories of 'equality' and 'difference' which informs this paradox is an apparent one. These categories, in fact, do not contradict each other considering that equality, by definition, includes an acknowledgment of the existence of difference. If women and men were identical to each other, equal rights would be superfluous; it is only because women are different from men that equality between them should be guaranteed.

In this collection of essays, Scott broadens the scope of her argument, suggesting that this paradox has not only haunted feminist writers and activists during the late eighteenth century, but that it has forced itself upon women throughout history. Despite the stress on the repetitions that pervade the rhetoric of successive generations of feminists, Scott nevertheless recognises variations over time. Drawing on French history from the French Revolution through the Third Republic, *Only paradoxes to offer* details the extraordinary struggles of four individual feminists, including Olympe de Gouges, socialist feminist Jeanne Deroin, Hubertine Auclert, and twentieth-century psychiatrist Madeleine Pelletier.

Scott's insights have been of great inspiration for my research, which focuses on women's writing, both fiction and non-fiction, produced during the age of the Democratic Revolutions of the late eighteenth century. My current research focuses more specifically on how women writers in both England and the Dutch Republic used the sentimental novel in order to delineate alternative ideals of womanhood. In particular, Scott's work has encouraged me to rethink French Revolutionary history and to further reflect on the ways in which women writers engaged with the ideology of sexual difference in their publications. When contextualising women writers' representations of the events in France, it makes sense to explain their changing assessments of the Revolution by referring to their changing perspectives on the socially transformative power of revolutionary politics. This reasoning seems to suggest that before the Terror period, women had some hope of being included in the political body of the new Republic. As Scott's book demonstrates, however, the citizen of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution was defined as masculine from the outset. *Only paradoxes to offer* has thus allowed me to better understand how mainstream Enlightenment thought effectively construed and othered women as non-citizens. Women's representations of the Democratic Revolutions changed over time, not because of a loss of faith in the emancipatory promise of these political

upheavals, but because of a need to adapt their rhetorical strategies to the changing discourses on sexual difference at the time.

Scott's book is a useful contribution to the fields of gender history and discourse analysis. It encourages readers to reconsider the relationship between specific moments in French political history and female authorship. The book is important for researchers in the fields of gender and diversity studies because it encourages the consideration of the clashing configurations of feminism today. The deeply ambiguous representation of contemporary feminism in the media is symptomatic of the broader individualisation of social problems. On the one hand, feminism is represented as a confrontational and radically transformative social movement capable of inspiring hope and excitement in the lives of women globally. On the other hand, it is co-opted by neoliberal strands of thought and used in attempts to legitimise the world the relentless exploitation and precarization of labour conditions as well as accompanying attacks on welfare benefits for all—from disability pensions to unemployment benefits. Even if women suffer disproportionately from these deepening inequalities and welfare benefit cutbacks, many young women reject feminism both in spite of, and because of, the great successes of women over the course of the preceding decades. Joan Scott's message that feminism has 'only paradoxes to offer' can help us make sense of this fundamentally ambiguous picture that has emerged.

Vanessa Van Puyvelde

Vanessa Van Puyvelde is an MA student in Gender and Diversity at Ghent University. She has obtained an MA degree in French and English Literature and Linguistics from Ghent University and aspires to apply for a PhD in comparative literature in the future. Her last MA research paper examined the rhetorical strategies in the works, both fiction and non-fiction, of Mary Wollstonecraft and Germaine de Staël against the backdrop of the French Revolution. Her current MA dissertation discusses the ways in which female novelists from England and the Dutch Republic used the novel as a way to delineate alternative ideals of womanhood within the larger context of the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century.

ⁱ An interview with Professor Gloria Wekker about methodological questions concerning intersectional analysis was published in *DiGeSt*: Van den Brandt, N., Schrijvers, L., Miri, A., & Mustafa, N. (2018). White Innocence: Reflections on Public Debates and Political-Analytical Challenges. An Interview with Gloria Wekker. *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 5(1), 67-82.

ⁱⁱ See Spreeuwenberg, L. (forthcoming). 'Love' as a Practice: Looking at Real People, in *New Philosophical Essays in Love and Loving* (edited by Cushing, S.). Palgrave Macmillan.