

Beyond the veil and the goddess

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Abstract

Modernity has challenged the traditional organization of societies in many ways. The relation between genders has been affected like the notion of private sphere which has been devalued in favor of the public sphere. Feminism tends to deny man in their rejection of the Greek patriarchal pattern, and fundamentalism constructs a tradition of veiling women and negating them in society. How to transcend this dialectical contradiction, which is itself a modern reaction to modernity? A new deal of rights and duties in society must go along with the reshaping of values in the private sphere and more co-operation of men and women in both realms. Flexibility and variety in society should be the frame in which the diversity of individuals can express itself. Religious attitude should also be linked to modesty and avoid proselytism.

Introduction

All cultures and civilizations make a distinction between private and public spheres, the public sphere corresponding to social behavior and the private sphere to the family. The private sphere, whether in patriarchal or matriarchal societies is usually dominated by the role of women, because of the importance of taking care of children who need more their mother in the early years of their life. Modernity initiated a process of analyzing world societies, first with Orientalism in Asia and the Middle East, and then through the lens of human sciences. The temporary superiority of modern societies has led to the excesses of portraying non modern societies and then to colonialism, mainly by the British and the French, the later pretending to have a *mission civilisatrice* in order to transform the world into their image. But modernity has also made the private sphere explode through its analysis and attempt to generalize the rights and duties of people in the frame of universal human rights.

The result has been the devaluation of the private sphere in favor of the public one and the rise of women's movements striving to gain the same rights as men in society. But the denying of the private sphere has rapidly led to the excess of voyeurism through the pornographic exhibition of privacy, particularly in the mass media, and also causes big problems of education for the children of modern societies. The need for the reconstruction of the private sphere in post-modern society is essential in order to rebuild the family space and also society values that can be shared by everybody. The crisis of justice in western societies is a symptom of societies disease.

As Durkheim says, "society is the soul of religion", then how does modern society influence religion? We can see this influence in two different ways:

- Fundamentalism is an answer, mainly for the religions of the book, in rebuilding the private sphere according to the rules of religion. The evidence of this reaction

can be found in the increasing number of women wearing a veil in the Muslim world. This recent trend can be understood as a reaction against modernity, as it has been triggered by colonialism, but it can also be seen as the negation of woman in society.

- The feminist answer is rather an attempt to find in religions of goddesses the reevaluation of woman in society. The rejection of the religions of the book can be explained because of the patriarchal society that goes along with them, but it can be seen also a rejection of man. This reaction can also be considered as a modern reaction because of the competition between the genders.

The roots of these two different attitudes are similar, but the result is opposite. They form the two poles of the dialectic of opposition between the genders and can be the basis for searching a third possibility, in-between, that would reshape the place of man and woman in post-modern society, but also reconstruct the private sphere according to the emancipation of woman in society and the possibility for men to take more responsibilities in the private sphere. The aim of this new deal is new possibilities of individuals fulfillment according to their character, but also better children's education.

Private and public spheres

The notion of public and private spheres goes back to the Greeks. The result of the Greek division and classification of cultural phenomena was the *polis*, the concept and reality of a structured political body set off in contrast to the *oikos*, or private household [Elshtain1993]. Speech, too, had its public and private moments. Some categories of human subjects – in Greek society, slaves and women were the most important ones – were confined to the private realms of discourse. Truly public, political speech was the exclusive preserve of free, male citizens. Neither women or slaves were public beings. But Plato would educate women “in precisely the same way” as men for otherwise they will lack that common purpose without which the state is doomed to be but half a state. Plato's motive for equal education of the genders was not primarily considerations of social justice, or equality, or individual rights but an instrumental drive, a means to his overriding end: social harmony and unity. Plato's insight here, later recast by Rousseau and contemporary feminists, is that a private realm in which women live lives of obscurity and retirement is not the best school for citizenship but a breeding ground of discontent.

But women and men in the past were separated by social arrangements and practices, ideologies, valuations, and the range and nature of spoken and written communication itself. Cut off from the philosophic speech of the *symposia* and the public speech of the *agora*, women's communication was isolated, and the result of one gender almost exclusively inhabiting a public sphere and the other gender the private one may help to explain why so many women and men literally could not (and cannot) “speak” to one another.

For Hegel, man is the public being and woman the private being. Just as the public world predominates and gives meaning to the private one, for Hegel public identity is central because the public realm is preeminently the realm that fully defines and humanizes man. But Hegel insisted that language is essential to a shared way of life and to linking public and private experiences, both of which are in some sense linguistically structured. Although man is the public being par excellence, woman experiences the public world through the mind-constituting medium of language as well.

From these elements of the history of public/private spheres, we can observe that this idea comes from the Greek culture and is strongly linked with language, at least for Western culture. Nevertheless, this notion belongs also to other cultures. The rights and duties of men and women are ruled by the Koran for the Muslim world, Confucianism and Asian philosophies in Asia and tradition in Africa.

Man is usually a being of public sphere or society and woman a being of private sphere or family. This organization of societies fits the reality or gender roles, as we can observe from the organization of most animal societies. Family has a role of procreation in which woman is central because of her need to be protected during her pregnancy and her importance in the basic education of children in their early years. Even in matriarchal societies, like in Tibet, women have the responsibility of children. If we want to understand the gender positions in societies, we must dissociate the public/private spheres and the status of man and women in societies.

The status of women in societies is influenced by tradition, history and conditions of life. For instance, even in Western societies, the status of women is higher in the US because at the beginning of colonization, during the epoch of pioneers, women were very few and thus had much power over men because of the need for men to build a family and the competition that followed among them. In Germany, women are much more powerful because of their participation in rebuilding Germany after WW2. In matriarchal societies, women rule society, like in the old Celtic world. Old traditions like the Celt and the Viking still carry values that sometimes put women in a ruling position. In term of conditions of life, societies of fishermen for instance value very much the role of woman in society because most of the men are away for very long periods, and women have to rule over society in their absence. So the status of woman in society is very complex, somehow subjective and varies along with time.

In the following section, we analyze the facts that have triggered the crisis of modern societies, namely the explosion of the private sphere.

The impact of late modernity on the private sphere

According to Lester Kurtz, modernity can be defined as the emergence of a global, scientific technological culture since the Industrial Revolution, and especially during the second half of the twentieth century [Kurtz1995]. David Harvey stresses that the logic that hides behind Enlightenment rationality is a logic of domination and oppression [Harvey1990]. Richard Fox describes modernity as the Enlightenment project, the Western Truths of alienated production and bureaucratic rationality and secular progress, and the associated practices of science, technology, humanism, productivity, development, and management [Fox]. Richard Roberts sees in pre-modernity Christendom, tradition and the *ancien regime*, in modernity the dialectic of Enlightenment, communism, instrumental reason and the European integration, and in post-modernity the progressive triumph of the market, fluidity of identities, the collapse of communism and the 'End of History' [Roberts2002,222].

Modernity is more or less associated with the enlightenment project of the 18th century. It began with Orientalism that portrayed eastern societies and brought colonialism to most of the world through "the white man's burden" in Britain and the *mission civilisatrice* in France [Hochschild2003]. Modernity also challenged religion with the development of sciences that put into question the dogma of the Church. The key word of modernity is therefore competition and domination. These principles have brought democracy in social organization and capitalism with its law of supply

and demand.

The main mean for discovering, analyzing and representing the world is technology that developed along with science. The technological, economical and to some extent cultural superiority of Western societies has spread their values all over the world with the globalization of technology. But as a boomerang effect, the increase of transfer of population has led to relativism in western societies with the competition of different world views and ethos. After having analyzed the rest of the world, western societies are now portraying themselves in a Hollywood culture of cinema and reality shows. The exhibition in public of individual problem has led to the explosion of the private sphere and huge difficulties to maintain the stability of families with a tremendous increase of divorces in modern societies.

An other point of importance is the end of Greek metaphysics since Nietzsche under the influence of Asian philosophers and Buddhism. The result is to put into question the Greek values inherited by Western societies since Plato's republic. It follows that when an individual changes an ideological stance, he or she drops old rules and assumes new ones for reacting to situations, cognitively and emotively. A sense of rights and duties applied to feeling in situations is also changed [Hochschild2003].

In short, society driven by democracy, increasing technological power, new means of expression with the mass media, and competition has triggered or made possible the expression of discontent by women who felt more and more devalued in modern societies. This discontent is the basis of various movements of women in order to reshape the rights and duties for men and women. The aim is to reconstruct the private sphere or family according to the principle that rule modern society in the West, or to go back to tradition that prevailed before colonialism for other societies. The next section is dedicated to the analysis of feminism and fundamentalism as a reaction against modernity and an attempt to reconstruct the private sphere.

Feminist and fundamentalist reactions against modernity

This section presents two opposite ways of reconstructing the private sphere. Both are a reaction against modernity, on one hand the feminism of modern women strives to reverse the organization of society based on Greek values in order to replace a patriarchal society by a matriarchal one; on the other hand, fundamentalism goes back to religious tradition. In order to make a contrast between these two ways, we stress on radical feminism and Muslim fundamentalism.

Feminist waves in history may be differentiated in the following way [Woodhead] [RiotSarcey2002]:

- The first wave of feminism, which gathered momentum in the late nineteenth century, wished to claim equality between the sexes in society. In France, this wave is strongly linked with the “*suffragettes*” who struggled for the same civil rights as men. Although, in 1919 the French *assemblée* gave the vote to women, this law was blocked by the *sénat*, and it is only in 1946 that women could vote and have representatives in the French parliament, due to their participation in the French *resistance* during WW2.
- The second wave of feminism is more related to identity between man and woman. It was launched by Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* that was published in 1949 and influenced the 1968 movement in France. Simone de Beauvoir's motto

was that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman”. Furthermore, Beauvoir claims that “in truth women have never opposed female values to males values.” Beauvoir, argues that Marxism is a male theory of economic production that does not apply to women’s experience. The main achievement of this movement is the the right for contraception, and abortion which allowed women to master their sexuality. On the political and social point of view, one could argue that rather than bringing female values, women tended more to identify themselves with males in challenging men on their field. But one could also argue that “One is not born, but rather becomes a man” and that the field on which both genders struggle is not the field of men values but rather the field of power. Nevertheless, the biological basis of man and woman, and the observation of young children proves that a man is not a woman and vice-versa, and that the claim for identity deviates wrongly from the equality of the first wave of feminism.

- This is the aim of the third wave feminism, which began in the 1990s and seeks to explore gender differences which are now understood as complex, multi-faceted, fluid, constructed, and only loosely related to the body. But the very name of feminism does not give room to men's participation and is still a kind of gender opposition and competition, sticking to the logic of modernity.

The feminist movement can be diffracted in four main streams [Elshtain1993]. (a) The liberal feminists retain an implicit public-private division but hope to erase the harmful results the traditional split had for women, they are associated with the suffragists. But the vote of women did not see the victory of private morality in the public sphere. (b) Marxist feminism sees woman like a proletarian, and sees sex and class as critical determinants of women's place. But the assimilation of public and private into universal laws and abstracted structures requires Abstract Man, Abstract Woman and Abstract Child who are far from real persons. (c) Psychoanalytic feminism asks for a break in the female monopoly over early child care, arguing that the more father absence in the family, the more severe are conflicts about masculinity and fear of women. (d) The radical feminist portrait of man represents, in some ways, an inversion of the misogynist views of women [Elshtain1993]. Men and women, for some radical feminists, are born “that way”. The problem historically has been that the male, an aggressive and evil being, has dominated, oppressed, exploited, and victimized the female, a being of a very different sort.

It is interesting to notice that the radical feminism is a perfect contradiction of the Greek view of society. Even the derive into homosexuality is present as it requires that a woman becomes a lesbian. But this homosexuality is one of substitution, following the negation of men. As Durkheim considered that society is the soul of religion and that it continues to be that the idea of the sacred is of social origin and can be explained only in sociological terms, the vision of society has an effect on religion. [Durkheim1975]. It follows that radical feminists reject the patriarchal religions of the Book and tend to search new spiritualities in religions of the goddess.

But we can argue that if women bring up children, why then do the principles that they condemn continue in future generations? Isn't it that women themselves teach the patterns of the society that they denounce? On the political level, since women have now the vote, and since in democracies there are more women than men, why then are the leaders of democracies not women? One can argue that when a woman is at the head of a state, she acts like a man, and sometime makes war, which is far from the angelic vision of woman that some feminists claim. In the private sphere, most of the time, the woman manages the family budget, participates in

decision making and often also dominates the man who is sometimes seen as an instrument for bringing welfare. In the end, we can observe that if the suffragists were right in their fight for equality and were followed by many men who shared the same ideal, the second wave of feminism deviated in the extremism of identity between genders. The positive result of later feminism might be to recognize that man is not always related to domination and woman to weakness, and to dissociate power from gender from the examples that women in power give. This is probably why Freud claimed that all human beings are psychically bisexual.

Is there then a possibility of a third feminist wave? The very name constitutes a rejection of man and is therefore inadequate to be the basis of common reflexion on the reconstruction of the private sphere, now that women have the power to express their will in elections. It can only gather frustrated women that engage in an homosexuality of substitution, - in the difference of true homosexuals that engage in homosexual movements – and men like in Monty Python's *Life of Bryan* who claim the right to have babies.

We shall now see the other side of the contrast we build in order to transcend what we see as the two poles of the dialectic of genders, namely religious fundamentalism and its most evident expression in term of gender with the Islamic veil. According to Gerrie ter Haar, for many people today, the word « fundamentalism » is automatically associated with Islamic fundamentalism.

There are two Quranic injunctions and one Hadith which are most often quoted as the rationale for womens covering:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that will make for greater purity for them, and Allah is well acquainted with all that they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and adornments except what ordinarily appears thereof, that they should draw their veils (*khimar*) over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, fathers, husband's fathers...[lists relatives] Quran, Surat Al-Noor 24:30-31

O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments (*jilbab*) over their persons [when out of doors] that is most convenient, that they should be known and not molested. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Quran, Surat Al-Ahzab 33:59

If a woman reaches the age of puberty, no part of her body should be seen except for this (and he pointed to his face and hands) Hadith.

There is a danger in looking at scripture to explain the behavior of its followers, as theory is often far from practice and the meaning of sacred texts is never universally understood. As Bullock [Bullock2002] points out, religious text does not determine in any causal way how people live, factors such as interpretation, via schools of law, prevailing discourse and local custom need to be considered.

The question of veiling appeared in the 1970s with the Islamic revolution in Iran and the struggle of religious movements in the middle East. Gilles Kepel considers that the 1970s was a decade of cardinal importance for the relationship

between religion and politics [Kepel1994]. Iranian law portrays wearing Islamic clothing as a legal obligation, not a voluntary religious one. It is represented as necessary to protect national morality, unveiled women are seen as a threat to the moral fabric of society [Afshar1998]. The *intifada hijab* was not about modesty/respect nationalism/activism, but the power of religious nationalists to impose themselves and in positioning women's dress and behavior as appropriate subjects of political discipline [Hammami1997]. This trend spread in other Muslim countries and Muslim communities in the West. Bloul asserts that Maghrebi women's freedom of choice and margins of action are limited because they are in a position of individuals facing collective social power, might be it French or Maghrebi. The schoolgirls at the center of the controversy in France were presented by their supporters as independent moral actors and by their detractors as puppets of patriarchal tyranny [Bloul1996]. This demonstrates that the debate about veiling is more than just about human rights, but also about cultural ideals. For those on the 'Western' side, who argue that veiling is oppressive, it masks their Orientalism. For those on the Islamic side of the debate who argue veiling is a liberation from Western excess, it demonstrates Occidentalism. Indeed, when people claim a 'return' to 'tradition' they are often re-inventing, or even inventing it in the process.

Brenner maintains that most women agreed that the decision to wear Islamic clothing must be voluntary to be meaningful, as it must stem from their own willingness to transform their behavior and that the motivation comes from a new awareness [Brenner1996]. The meaning of *hijab* to these particular women is outside the discourse of Islamic nationalism and women as guardians of authenticity, which are useful but do not apply to this context. Watson argues that the new veiling should not be seen as imposed or as a constraint but as a deliberate act of choice which springs from ideals of what an Islamic society should be. But from the point of view of the women in the new veiling trend, oppression is a result of secular social processes not associated with the ideal of Islam. The new veiling is an interweaving of personal and political concerns and that what the women who are part of it have in common is that they are making an active, politicized response to forces of change [Watson1994].

Religious fundamentalism flourished against modernity and its effect on the private sphere and social behavior. But we see that it manifests itself in different ways. El Guindi argues that it is not the veil per se, which should be analyzed but the 'code' underlying it [ElGuindi1999]. So we have to differentiate the inner *hijab* which is the expression of an inner state from the outer one which is how it is seen by others. For the 'inner' dimension of *hijab*, the intention, motive and behavior observed by the wearer in association with it, does not necessarily conform to the way it is understood in the wider social and cultural context, as is the case with the new veiling trend. Bridgewood notes that the act of covering the hair has frequently been interpreted as a sign of self-restraint, control and denial of sexuality [Bridgewood1995]. According to El Guindi, Islamic morality accepts sexuality but regulates public behavior forbidding the public flaunting of sexuality [ElGuindi1999]. In Islamic discourse, modesty should have an outer expression in dress and an inner manifestation, an attitude or state of mind which affects behavior, and Watson argues that modesty is a complex concept that refers to an inner state and a repertoire of behaviors [Watson1994].

When the Taliban lost power in Afghanistan, women were not forced any more to wear the *Burka*, but most of them went on wearing it. Why? Because it is part of their tradition. But the very few women who changed their appearances means

freedom and gives value to the ones who continue to wear the Burka. On the contrary, the obligation for women to wear the veil in Iran is a denial of women's rights and freedom and thus denies any meaning in their dressing. In the same logic, we can argue that the banning of headscarf in school or public jobs in France is a denial of women's right. So although with opposite decisions, we can see that in both cases France and Iran, women's rights are denied. Society should guarantee human rights to the citizens, and in the case of the veiling, allow both situations, but also be vigilant that the behavior of a person is a personal decision, as in many countries, including the West, women are victims of pressure that force them to wear the veil against their will. In this regard, we can argue that in a liberal and free society for women, the veil mixes with the mini skirt. So as counter examples to France and Iran, we can see in Great Britain and the Lebanon the values of tolerance and freedom applied to women. The difference between an authoritative state and a liberal one sometimes affects a few percents of the population, as we have seen in Afghanistan, but these few individuals who do not conform to the main behaviors guarantee the principles of free consciousness that we find in the human rights.

This section was dedicated to the analysis of two different ways of reacting against modernity and the explosion of the private sphere, namely feminism and fundamentalism. On one hand, feminism negates the patriarchal values of modernity in striving to get the same rights for men and women for liberal feminists, but the radical feminists go further and negate man. On the other hand fundamentalism goes back to the patriarchal values of the religions of the book, whether from women's will or the oppression of men's society on women. This system of negation of man or woman in society can be understood as a modern reaction to modernity, as it is based on competition and domination among genders. The following section tries to analyze ways of reconstructing the private sphere.

New deal of rights and duties and reshaping religion according to social changes

We have seen in the previous section that the crisis among genders was the devaluation of the private sphere by the modern principle of competition which affects all relations in society. So the main point is to replace competition by cooperation and opposition by difference.

Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo claims that perhaps the most egalitarian societies are those in which public and domestic spheres are only weakly differentiated, where neither sex claims much authority and the focus of social life itself is the home [Elshtain1993]. Popenoe argues that in all modern societies families are in “decline” in five senses of the word: (a) families are less directed toward collective goals; (b) they carry out fewer traditional functions, such as procreation, control of sexuality, and socialization of the young; (c) they have lost power to other institutions such as the state and school; (d) they are smaller and less stable and (e) individual commitments to family are weaker.

So on what basis can we reconstruct the private sphere? More commitment of women in society goes along with more commitment of men in their family. History and human sciences can help to find the similarities and differences between men and women in order to make a new deal of rights and duties for both genders.

The first point is certainly to dissociate power from gender, as both men and women have tendencies of domination or submission. But the affirmation of women politically and economically goes along with more fathering in terms of *engagement* (eg feeding the child, playing catch), *accessibility* (cooking in the kitchen while the child plays in the next room), and *responsibility* (being the one who makes sure the

child gets what he or she needs) [Hochschild2003]. The organization of society has to take into account the reshaping of these rights and duties and offer opportunities for men to get more involved in the family, and women to have more responsibilities in the society. Interesting examples in this domain come from Scandinavian societies, where traditionally the Viking vision of genders is more egalitarian. In Norway, for example, all employed men are eligible for a year's paternity leave at 90 percent pay. Some 80 percent of Norwegian men take a month of parental leave [Hochschild2003]. Hochschild suggests some family-friendly reforms:

- Flextime: a workday with flexible starting and quitting times, but usually 40 hours of work and the opportunity to “bank” hours at one time and reclaim them later.
- Flexplace: home-based work, such as telecommuting
- Regular or permanent part-time: less than full-time work with full or pro-rated benefits and proportional opportunities in proportion to one's skill and contribution
- Job sharing: two-people voluntarily sharing one job with benefits and salary pro-rated
- Compressed working week: four 10-hour days with three days off, or three 12-hour days with four days off
- Paid parental leave
- Family obligations as a consideration in the allocation of shift work and required overtime

The aim of reforming society is to redefine room for private life in the post-modern world and to reconcile genders in order to establish harmony and unity. When love and sexuality go back to the private sphere they will be able to express themselves in the individual diversity, instead of being pornographically portrayed in the mass media. The role of society is to define general values and behaviors that are derived from tradition and individual consent. Therefore, even basic principles are understood differently in different societies. So how can we build homogeneous principles in the heterogeneous milieu of individuals, families and communities? Probably through flexibility and example from the leaders. It is interesting to note that the Muslim community of France which is divided on the ban of the headscarf was united in denouncing the external pressure of terrorists on France for the same topic, arguing that the solution to this disagreement should be found in the French society itself. One solution could be to ban the scarf in schools until the age of 16, as the injunction of the Quran to wear it concerns only post-adolescent girls. But if people want to live in a free and tolerant society, the main value to be cultivated is certainly modesty, which is also favored in the Quran, unlike proselytism which has been at the origin of the French reaction.

Conclusion

The family is the fundamental brick that constitutes societies all over the world because of its role for procreation and education but also for the room it offers individuals to build a micro-society. The private sphere is described from outside with its rights and duties which are usually derived from tradition and religion. The model for Western countries was the Greek society, but late modernity has brought competition as principle of organization and evolution, which produced relativism of ethos, secularization and privatization of religion. Along with competition of social classes, nations, races and religions, genders also question the present distribution of rights and duties. This has led to the explosion of the private sphere and tremendous problems of education of children because of the instability of their environment. But it is also a way to reconstruct the private sphere on new values along with the public

sphere. Women should be more involved in public affairs and men should participate more to family activities. But if we can theorize on the public organization of the society, it is difficult to study what is usually concealed and represents as many diversities as humans on earth. Because the private sphere is also made of love and sexuality, its stability can be built on all forms of their expression, from the softest to the hardest relationship. This is the problem in studying the gender relation, as for example, the aim of a little boy who pulls the hair of a little girl may be to hurt her or to draw her attention. So the main principle in reorganizing the private and the public spheres is certainly flexibility which allows diversity to flourish against the political correctness that freezes society. This reshaping of public and private spheres could bring more stability to families and therefore a better education of children. In genders relation like in all relationships, the replacement of competition by humor is a powerful way of transforming negative opposition into positive difference [Loretta].

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