A CONVERSATION WITH ANNE PHILLIPS ON MULTICULTURALISM

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INTRODUCTION

During March 2015, Professor Anne Phillips of the London School of Economics was a visiting fellow at Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS). On 13 March a group of nine gender scholars from different disciplines held a one-day workshop to explore the notion of multiculturalism with her. At the end of the workshop it was suggested that *Gender Questions* should conduct an electronic interview with Professor Phillips and that the scholars who attended the workshop would write responses to the interview. What follows are the interview with Professor Phillips and responses from four of the gender scholars who attended: Professor Amanda Gouws (Political Science, Stellenbosch University) Professor Desiree Lewis (Women's and Gender Studies, University of the Western Cape), Professor Louise du Toit (Philosophy, Stellenbosch University), and Dr Stella Viljoen (Fine Arts, Stellenbosch University). The other scholars who attended were Professor Shireen Hassim (Political Studies, University of the Witwatersrand), Professor Kopano Ratele (Unisa/Medical Research Council), Professor Cherryl Walker (Sociology, Stellenbosch University) and Dr Christi van der Westhuizen (HUMA, University of Cape Town).

INTERVIEW WITH ANNE PHILLIPS

Key: Anne Phillips (AP); Deirdre Byrne (DB).

DB: The title of your 2010 book, *Gender and culture*, has formed the starting point for an engagement at STIAS. Can you tell us why you find it so timely at this historical juncture to consider how gender and culture articulate with one another?

AP: You're right, of course, to point to historical juncture. There *is* a more timeless answer to your question, which might note that gender and culture alike are social constructions, and might stress the ways in which all our practices of gender are weighted with cultural meaning, and all our practices of culture are heavily gender coded. But my own preoccupation is more politically driven. It seems to me inconsistent to be committed to a politics that challenges domination and inequality in gender relations, yet remains indifferent to all other axes of power, and culture has become one of the sites on which unequal power relations are fought out. So I am one of those who assumes a connection – some potential shared concerns – between a feminist politics challenging gender inequalities and a multicultural politics (let's call it that, for the moment) challenging the monoculturalisms that have represented difference as inferior. But this isn't, of course, a simple alliance. First, culture is endlessly deployed to block movements for gender equality. For example, when countries ratify CEDAW (the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) with 'reservations', the reason they most commonly give for refusing to implement certain provisions for equality is that they see these as at odds with their culture. Much of feminist politics is a struggle against culture, or at least against certain ways of defining and imposing culture.

And then there is the further twist, in contemporary Europe, which is that ideas of gender equality and women's rights are increasingly mobilised – by people who otherwise show little sign of caring about these – as means of attacking those who have migrated from outside Europe. Gender equality is proclaimed as a core principle of contemporary Europe (would that it were!) and the principle is deployed to depict entire ethno-cultural groups as patriarchal, oppressive, backward. Women's rights then becomes the slogan of those seeking to abandon any vestiges of multicultural policy: we are told that an excess of multiculturalism has shored up the authority of socially conservative cultural leaders and sacrificed the rights of women to the preservation of cultures we'd do better without. For anyone who thinks, as I do, that there are shared concerns between feminism and multiculturalism, this makes for an especially challenging moment.

DB: Staying with your book, it addresses the question of whether a gender transformation agenda can accommodate itself to an increasingly multicultural world. Do you think that is an accurate summary of one of the book's central purposes?

AP: I wouldn't put it quite like that, because it suggests that we had a gender transformation agenda fitted for a monocultural world, but now have to adjust it to a multicultural one. Certainly, the book is framed by the reality of a world constituted by layers of global migration – some voluntary, some much less so – and the importance of engaging with cultural difference in ways that neither stereotype people nor assume a hierarchy of majority over minority, or 'modern' over 'traditional'. And the imagined readership is indeed those committed to gender equality, but struggling to find a way through current practices and discourses of culture. I organised a workshop a few years ago, with Sawitri Saharso, a colleague from the Netherlands, which brought together feminists from various parts of Europe to discuss how tensions between gender equality and cultural diversity were playing out in our different countries. It struck me that we spent more time analysing the meretricious use of the language of women's rights by the anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-multiculturalism lobbies, than we did exploring ways in which cultural tradition was being invoked, in equally meretricious ways, to limit women's rights. It was hard, that is, to get a balance between these two. We do need to contest the cultural stereotyping and challenge the lazy generalisations. But we also need to address what are real issues for some women and girls: the bullying of some young people into unwanted marriages with supposedly safer – more traditional – partners from the parents' country of origin; the very real risk, for some young girls, of genital cutting; the pressures some community leaders exert on women not to leave an abusive marriage. If the book has one central purpose, it is to help articulate a strong feminist politics that contests the misuse of the language of women's rights to stereotype and attack minority groups, but it does this without abandoning the terrain of gender equality.

DB: Could you explain how you think the quest for gender equity should adapt to concerns of cultural relativism? At first sight, it may seem that there is an irreconcilable chasm between them, since feminism is striving for equality between men and women while *in*equality is inscribed in many cultures. Is there a way for these two agendas to meet?

AP: I think we have to refuse cultural relativism: we certainly have to refuse it if we take it to mean that norms of equality or justice are only relative to the culture in which they are formed, and that it is inappropriate to take the norms that emerge within one culture as the measure against which to assess the practices of another. Apart from anything else, this is such a reification and simplification of culture. It suggests that each 'culture' is entirely self-consistent – as if all the norms fit neatly together and are happily endorsed by everyone in the cultural group – and it gives the impression that cultures grow up in total isolation from one another. But even without the poor sociology, that kind of cultural relativism is clearly incompatible with a strong politics of gender equality, because we know that gender equality has not been the abiding principle of most societies, and that shouldn't stop us striving for it! There is a partial truth, as I see it, in cultural relativism, which is that norms are indeed formed in historical context: that there are particular moments in which it becomes possible to formulate certain ideas and ideals, and that the ones we care most about at present may not then be the last word. People didn't always think equality was an important value, for example, in fact they didn't start thinking this until very recently. So there is a kind of relativity built into the development of our norms and values. But I think the problem you are pointing to becomes easier to approach when we refuse to attach that relativity to something termed 'culture'. We need to challenge the reifications that understate the diversity within what are too often presented as unified cultures, and we need to query the exaggerations of difference between cultures. For as long as I can recall thinking about these issues, I have reacted against statements about the way different nationalities supposedly think and behave: 'the British', 'the French', 'the Irish' – what on earth do these lazy generalisations, cutting across all differences of class, gender, age, region, everything, actually mean? I find it similarly implausible when people talk about 'Muslim culture' or 'Chinese culture' or 'African culture'. By much the same token – it *is* very much the same sort of thing – I find it deeply implausible when people talk about what women and men think and want. We have a lot of resources within feminism for thinking about and challenging simplifications – it's something we have been doing for a long time – and that's the first step in challenging the either/or choice between an uncritical universalism and an uncritical relativism.

DB: In the second chapter of the book, you address the interrelated matters of cultural relativism, multiculturalism, and their apparently polar opposite, universalism. I have heard the discourse of human rights hailed as 'universal'. Do you think this claim has any value?

AP: To me, human rights are very clearly a historically located invention: they come into political discourse at a certain point in time, and they become a major focus of political action at a certain point in time. Some people think of human rights not so much as invention, but as discovery. From this perspective, we have certain human rights by virtue of being human; this is a universal truth, something that has always been true; but it took us a while (rather a long while) to realise it. I don't share this view. I see human rights as very much a political claim – a hugely important one, but a claim nonetheless – and not to be understood as grounded in any truths about human beings or human nature. On this, I'm closer to what I take to be Hannah Arendt's understanding of human rights and human equality as a commitment we make to one another. The term 'universal' still has some relevance here, because it captures something of what I would like people to commit themselves to: that we will regard *all* humans as having these human rights. And on that aspect – if I'm claiming

these rights for myself, don't I think you are entitled to them too? – I guess I do edge towards a rather universalistic position. Certainly, I find it hard to accept that the rights I regard as important to my life are somehow unnecessary to yours. Perhaps the way to think of this is to say that there are three different meanings of 'universal' at work here. There is the universality that claims human rights as a universal truth: no, I don't think rights are like this. There is the universality that claims human rights as rights for everyone: yes, if we mean anything at all by the notion of *human* rights, we must surely mean this. And then there is the universality that relates to the content we give the rights: here, I'm more open-ended. I think the content we put into human rights is constantly changing, being expanded upon, politically reworked (including through the very extensive feminist reworkings of human rights), and that this is part of what is implied in saying that human rights are a political claim. But I find it hard, as I say, to think that the particular rights that matter to me are somehow irrelevant to others.

DB: From the chapter I've read, the book appears to expand some of the arguments you make in your article, also published in 2010, entitled 'What's wrong with essentialism?' I see an intellectual intersection here. Do you think feminism should abandon its historical allegiance to essentialism in the 21st century, or do you still see a value for what Gayatri Spivak calls 'strategic essentialism'?

AP: I think it's helpful, here too, to tease out the different things we mean by essentialism, because it's become one of those terms we sometimes employ without really thinking what we are objecting to. Generalisation is not the same as stereotype, which is not the same, in its turn, as claiming an essential ahistorical core, though these can and do bleed into one another in complicated ways. If we think of essentialism as naturalising, dehistoricising, claiming some essential core, then we shouldn't engage in it even for strategic reasons. If, alternatively, we regard any generalisation about women or gender difference as essentialist, this is not, in my view, something we can hope to avoid. In *Only paradoxes to offer*, Joan Scott makes a comment that has always stuck with me. She says (I am paraphrasing here) that the goal of feminism is to eliminate sexual difference in politics, but that it has to make its claims on behalf of 'women'; and to the extent that it acts for 'women', it then produces the very sexual difference it seeks to eliminate. The important part of that comment (for me) is the phrase 'has to': this is a tension built into the politics, or, as Scott says elsewhere, it is feminism's constitutive paradox. So while I think we should continue to contest essentialisms – of gender and of culture – wherever we encounter them, there are certain purifications of language and politics that are just not available to us.

DB: One of the problems feminism would like to avoid is the one Gayatri Spivak identified in her 1988 essay, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in which she correctly criticises white academics speaking for brown women. Do you think the academy has managed to move away from this habit in the past 27 years?

AP: I tend to think of it as one of the founding principles of the contemporary women's movement that it challenged the notion that others can speak for us, and once that's in the lexicon, it has to go all the way: so it is not just that men cannot be left to speak for women,

but that middle-class women cannot be left to speak for working-class women, heterosexual women for lesbian women, white women for brown women, and so on. But there is a fine line between speaking for and speaking about, and when we insist upon speaking about – as I do, for example, when I speak about problems faced by ethnic minority women in Europe, which are not, directly, *my* problems – we don't always get the line between these two right. So I wouldn't confidently claim, of myself or the academy generally, that we have managed to move away from this habit. The only way you could be sure never to slip from speaking 'about' to speaking 'for' would be never to do the first, and that would leave us trapped in our narrow preoccupations. As with the problem of essentialism, there are some risks it is almost impossible to avoid, so it is more a matter of continual effort, self-awareness and willingness to listen to criticism than any possible guarantee.

DB: The difficult intersection between feminism and respect for cultural difference, which you have identified in *Gender and culture*, is also found in the South African experience. Would you like to say a few words about our context (for example, about how South African feminists could approach these matters)?

AP: One obvious area of difference is that there is nowhere in contemporary Europe that practises significant forms of legal pluralism, or gives significant recognition to versions of customary law, so the particular ways in which gender equality and respect for cultural difference articulate – and can come into tension – in South Africa don't arise in the same way in Europe. Beyond that contrast, there is a very similar set of issues about how one is to understand claims made on behalf of culture, tradition or custom, and whether a sufficiently de-essentialised understanding of culture, in which women can become norms-creators as well as norms-carriers, can open up a more promising space beyond the starker opposition between either culture or rights. Theoretically as well as pragmatically, I tend to favour transformations from within – the kind of developments talked about in South Africa under the rubric of 'living customary law' – but I am somewhat pessimistic about the actual scope for internal contestation when the authority of those who currently 'speak for' the culture is opposed to this. I think there are many contexts, therefore, in which one has to rely more on the equality rights enshrined in the constitution – but that's hardly for me to say.

DB: Please explain what you mean by multiculturalism without culture. Would cosmopolitanism meet this ideal of multiculturalism without culture?

AP: As you will have gathered from what I have said so far, I am critical of the ways we (this is 'we' in Europe) have come to talk about cultures and cultural traditions, and in particular, the way in which what is often a very contested activity is misrepresented as if it were slavishly followed by all those associated with a particular cultural group (as when people talk of 'honour killing', for example, as if it were a cultural tradition). All of us are shaped by our cultural context and influences, but all of us are also individuals, sometimes embracing these influences, sometimes rejecting them, sometimes not even noticing they are there. In many ways, I would prefer us to stop talking about cultures (as if there are 'things' called cultures) and just talk about cultural influences or cultural meanings. So why do I say multiculturalism without culture? Why not cosmopolitanism instead? My reasons

for continuing to define myself by reference to multiculturalism are partly contingent: the contingencies of a Europe where rejecting multiculturalism has become associated either with a barely disguised rejection of immigration and nostalgia for racial purity, or with an arrogant assimilationism that sees no reason why the majority should ever question its own values, and regards itself as already the repository of the truth. I don't want to ally myself with those who would potentially be my allies if I join the more wholehearted critique of multiculturalism. But I also have my reservations about cosmopolitanism, which I still see as marked by a modernising hierarchy and never quite able to throw this off, no matter how much today's cosmopolitans redefine themselves as 'rooted' cosmopolitans, or insist on their openness to culture. But I confess that I have recently written an essay entitled 'A reluctant cosmopolitan', so clearly this is something on which my mind is not yet made up!

DB: Thank you very much for your time and for the answers to the questions. I would like to wish you an enjoyable and successful rest of your stay in South Africa.

A RESPONSE TO ANNE PHILLIPS

Amanda Gouws

In *Gender and culture* (2010, 18), Anne Phillips rejects the idea of cultural relativism in the face of a strong feminist discourse of gender equality and rights, pointing out that feminists have been sensitive to the dangers of elevating cultural understandings to unquestioned norms and to how cultural understandings shape what are presented as universal principles of justice and truth. She also warns us in her response above to beware of essentialism that is naturalising, dehistoricising, and claiming some essential core.

In order to grapple with multiculturalism we need to consider the production of cultural identity and understand the conflicts of power around identity production (Scott 1995, 8). In postcolonial, postapartheid South Africa, racialised identities were constructed hierarchically for the purposes of rule, so that cultural differences caused by race/ethnicity can be viewed in terms of a hierarchy rather than cultural variation, as noted by Phillips.[1]

While cultural identities in South Africa have become more fluid since the democratic transition, the essentialism of the apartheid racial categories remains intact, even post-transition (in order to track the success of affirmative action), so that race still assumes a hierarchy of the modern over the traditional, and the privileged over the disadvantaged. In this regard the essentialism of racial identities remains naturalising, dehistoricising and ahistorical, obscuring processes of discrimination that produced these identities in the first place, or how the superiority or universality of some over the inferiority or particularity of others was established (Scott 1995, 5).

Joan Scott (1995, 6) writes about identity/culture in pluralist societies as 'the referential sign of a fixed set of customs, practices and meanings, an enduring heritage, a

readily identifiable sociological category, a set of shared traits and/or experiences', where diversity is viewed as a plurality of identities, assuming a level political playing field in a democratic system. Our understanding of how these identities should be recognised depends on the universal against which the particularity of groups is measured. Or, as Balibar (1995, 174) puts it, cultures (or cultural identity) can only be thought of in their social diversity in comparison with universals (see also Du Toit 2014). In the South African case, colonisation and apartheid produced the discrimination that established white racial identity/white culture as the universal.

The objective conditions as well as the subjectivity of the lived experience of racialisation and racism under apartheid were replaced after 1994 with individualism and individual claims to universal human rights as core aspects of a liberal democratic ideology. The abstract character of liberal political membership and the ideological naturalised character of liberal individualism work against politicised identity formation – they work to prevent, as Brown (1995, 203–205) puts it, the recognition or articulation of differences as political. As Brown argues, liberal discourse continuously recolonises political identity as political interest and converts political identity into essentialised private interest. It therefore subjects claims by cultural groups to the interests of individuals, in a way that makes individuals believe that their claims to rights will be protected, even if such rights are undermined by intragroup discriminatory practices.

The way cultures treat women has become the marker of how liberal or illiberal they are, and gender equality is viewed as a liberal universal value against which women's treatment is measured. Cultural relativism therefore cannot be accepted, since it means that different cultural groups or communities have varying norms for gender justice, and these norms are not formulated under conditions of gender equality, as Phillips argues.

Phillips' solution for multicultural dilemmas (where cultural groups curtail or prevent gender equality) is multiculturalism without groups (or without culture) or the recognition of the rights of the individual, rather than those of groups: '[T]he rights that matter in developing a case for multiculturalism are those of individuals, not groups' (Phillips 2007, 162–165). She supports multiculturalism without the reified notion of culture or homogeneous conceptions of cultural groups, and suggests that solutions to multicultural dilemmas are to be found through discussion and dialogue.

While these solutions to multicultural dilemmas cannot be faulted, the idea of individuals' rights taking priority over group rights begs the question: How is this different from liberalism's notion of the accommodation of individuals, where individual rights trump group rights? Maybe Phillips' solution is more realistic in European societies dealing with the influx of migrants, but how does it propose a solution to the postcolonial society, where liberalism's solution, constructed as the 'privatised interest' of the individual, is always suspect when measured against the constructed universal of race identity? And where 'righting' historical wrongs means that there is a competition for upward mobility on the racial totem pole (or hierarchy) by different race groups to establish hegemony, even if it means individuals may have to sacrifice their rights claims?

Phillips' argument that the rights of the individual need to be prioritised confirms that human rights are indeed universal and trump cultural norms, yet she reminds us at the same time that even universal rights are always contextual or contextually constructed. This seems to be a contradiction.

Phillips suggests mechanisms to make possible the enforcements of rights for individuals as members of groups. In the South African case, a plural legal system has been established to enable constitutional law and customary law to exist side by side. Yet despite these measures, women often cannot exit their cultural groups or do not have individual autonomy to claim rights.

Even though gender equality in South Africa is constitutionally enshrined, gender equality claims are often subordinated to claims for racial justice. Shireen Hassim has shown, in her analysis of Brett Murray's painting (*The Spear*), showing President Zuma with his genitals exposed, that a gendered interpretation of the painting is trumped by a racialised defence of the president's dignity. This defence challenges the reinscription of a 'white gaze' on a black body. It masks an understanding of virility and entitlement to women's bodies as a marker of power. A contrary analysis by feminists about the violence inflicted on women's bodies by powerful men will open them up to charges of racism and being un-African.

How do the mechanisms of a strong constitution, a very progressive Bill of Rights and access to civil courts protect black African lesbian women, when the Leader of the Council for Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) says in parliament that 'being gay is unAfrican' and opens up real possibilities of 'corrective rape' for black lesbian women? The extent to which the individual rights of women living under customary law are realised in deeply patriarchal cultural groups is tightly bound up with the degree of 'progressiveness' of the specific traditional leader under whose rule they reside. Conflict between culture and rights often can only be resolved through the coercive mechanisms of the state. It is therefore a fair question to ask whether it is at all possible for women in these conditions to become norms-creators as well as norms-carriers who can open up a more promising space beyond the opposition between culture and rights, as Phillips suggests.

REFLECTIONS ON MULTICULTURALISM AND GENDER-RELATED STRUGGLES

Desiree Lewis

Introduction

Contemporary feminist scholars and activists acknowledge that conceptualising power and resistance in the present day needs to take into account the diffuseness, complexity and contradictoriness of both dominant and oppressive political systems and struggles

for democracy. This challenge becomes particularly evident in the face of the deluge of digitised and print images that engulf our cognitive landscape and often provide authoritative frames for us to make sense of the world. In a context where struggles around gender, class and race are often represented visually – on the internet and in newspaper images, for example – both dominant and subordinate groups' struggles for legitimacy or recognition often revolve around how forcefully they imagine these.

Claims to authority or struggles around diversity, difference and inequality are often interpreted in ways that suit the vantage points of those who claim to fight for 'justice', for 'recognition' or for 'democracy'. Consequently, struggles conveyed through visual texts and digitally circulated information (for example, press and documentary photographs or films) powerfully shape our sense of what is truly democratic.

I show, in the argument that follows, that multiculturalism provides a powerful lens through which conflict and difference can be visually interpreted and framed, rather than objectively 'captured'. Through this discussion, I raise concerns about the pitfalls of multiculturalism in explaining struggles for gender and sexual justice *vis-à-vis* intersecting power relations, including neo-imperialism, neoliberalism and global capitalism.

Multiculturalism in South Africa and elsewhere

Multiculturalism is not a term that many South African feminist scholars or activists generally use. Rarely do scholars or activists invoke 'multiculturalism' to explain identity politics or racialised struggles, or to propose solutions to these. The situation is strikingly different in the United States, the United Kingdom and Western Europe. Here, the so-called War on Terror and fears of radical Islam seem to have animated debates about multiculturalism in distinctive ways. Many conservatives[2] believe that multiculturalism, defined as the idea of culturally diverse groups coexisting in non-conflictual and mutually respectful ways – does not work. According to these pessimists, certain non-Western cultures, which are perceived as atavistic and static, routinely countenance gender and sexual oppression in the name of the collective. In so doing, they violate the individual's rights to freedom of choice, and their 'cultures' are believed to be innately out of sync with Western liberal democracy.

In the face of this stereotyping of 'third-world cultures', progressives have sought to revitalise multiculturalism without falling into the trap of endorsing a form of relativism that jettisons shared accountability for global political struggles. Anne Phillips' writing on multiculturalism (2007) exemplifies this progressive trend. On the one hand, it seeks to avoid universalising any one group's experiences, and on the other, it remains committed to fighting injustices globally. Phillips' confidence in multiculturalism, therefore, reflects her ongoing commitment to broad-based and transnational struggles for democracy that acknowledge inequalities and differences within coalitions of feminists and other progressives (see Phillips 1998).

While I find this confidence and commitment enormously inspiring, I am troubled by the political repercussions of the turn to multiculturalism as well as by the way this term has travelled and been mobilised. In particular, I feel uncomfortable with the way 'multiculturalism' lends itself to homogenising social struggles, rather than to the kind of auto-reflexivity and dialogue that open up radical questions about power and injustice, and therefore also radical quests for freedoms.

Chandra Mohanty (2003, 196) hones in sharply on one facet of the politics of multiculturalism by situating it in what she calls the '"race industry"… an industry that is responsible for the management, commodification, and domestication of race on American campuses'. Mohanty argues that one problem with the solutions proposed by advocates of multiculturalism is that their reasons derive primarily from individual psychology, from how individuals are exhorted to understand one another; in the process of elevating individual behavioural solutions, the structural and systemic foundations of power and conflict are blurred. Mohanty shows, therefore, that the preoccupation with people's attitudinal change is symptomatic of a degree of inattention to the deeper political and historical dynamics that create and reproduce differences, and also shape conflicts and struggles around such differences.

This is evident in the managerial dimensions of multiculturalism, which imply that a certain degree of cohesiveness within the collective has somehow been disturbed by the arrival or presence of people belonging to other cultures. The resulting multiculturalism then has to be managed. Multiculturalism has therefore thrived in northern contexts, where the presence of minorities and immigrants is seen to require practical and conceptual strategies for these groups' incorporation. The view of regulated incorporation, of the fundamental normativeness of the 'central' or 'original' collective, seems to haunt even the most radical efforts to avoid universalism. In other words, the central collective becomes the custodian of 'human' rights. Even when these human rights are questioned and adapted, they remain locked into a framework in which a 'centre' manages peripheries.

For example, when Phillips proposes a form of universalism that will be sensitive to difference, she argues that, despite the fact that powerful groups inevitably dominate the formulation of democratic principles, 'both principles and policies should be worked out with the fullest possible involvement of all relevant groups' (Phillips 2002, 31). This argument tends to flatten and simplify both power and struggle. It ignores, for example, the power embedded in dominant discourses of freedom (as in Western neoliberal democracy), questions of hegemony in the formation of ostensibly subaltern oppositions, and the unevenness of subjectivity formation in political action and consciousness. Far from seeing these dynamics as insurmountable obstacles to global justice, it becomes important to acknowledge these squarely, as feminists like Mohanty or Nira Yuval-Davis have done, in order to deepen our engagement with democratic goals and struggles.

Generally, then, presenting 'a case for multiculturalism' slips into countenancing *certain* rights, and shifts away from thinking about freedom, justice and social transformation in more auto-reflexive and radical ways that resist assimilationism. I firmly believe that this radical project need not lead to endless relativism or the postponement of action, but can be pursued in terms of what some feminists have defined as transversal politics (Yuval-Davis) or transnational politics (Mohanty).

Another and related reason for my unease, is how multiculturalism seems to naturalise the effects or symptoms of struggles, injustices and social inequalities (for example, blacks in Britain, migrants in Canada and an upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East) as though this is simply the way societies are. Mahmood Mamdani's (2004, 17–62) discussion of 'culture talk' conveys my position here. Mamdani argues that the ascendancy and rapid politicisation of the term 'culture' after the Cold War involves explaining historical and political processes according to that category. Likewise, the erasure of complex histories and politics, and the normalising of 'the way things are', go hand in glove with homogenising yet compelling calls to act in 'the interest of human good'. Far from being defined as an exercise of sovereignty, this acting for the human good is often imagined as rescue, a case of the collective logically establishing norms of justice and freedom for all. Focusing on 'culture' therefore shuts down on the possibilities of thinking rigorously and radically about how power actually works – through history, dominant discourses, subjectivity and hegemony. As I signal below, visuality offers an influential medium through which we can interrogate this deeper functioning of power.

Managing conflict visually

A range of work on photographic representations of racial and cultural difference shows how influentially an anthropological gaze operates as an apparatus of power. Photographs and documentary films of culturally coded others have fixated on their exoticism and strangeness. In so doing, they confirm others' diametric 'strangeness' *and* the normalcy of the viewer and the vantage point of the 'culture that looks'.

It seems to me that many recent flows of knowledge and information about gender and sexual justice perpetuate this binary. Compelling calls to act in the interest of human good have been conveyed through, for example, photographs of sexual minorities circulated by Reuters, in documentary films, or in images in blog posts and websites. These photos – whether realistic or obviously posed – have a strong affective function. Although many seem to rely on viewers' innate sense of what is moral and humane, they elicit strongly emotional responses by drawing on entrenched discourses and an archive of meanings about culture that precede them. Images that seem to call on viewers' innate sense of right and wrong rely on discursive constructions that, when we clearly articulate them, are extremely troubling. In particular, by reproducing print, digitised and documentary images of culturally defined 'other' women and sexual minorities as

those in need of rescue, these images ossify notions of culture and multiculturalism as neutral, rather than as symptomatic or constructed frames for making sense of power. These narratives are not the crude celebrations of Western-centric feminism and demonstrations of sovereignty that feminists such as Mohanty (2008) critiqued several decades ago. But they flood the global imaginary as persuasive indices of *the* collective, global good. And the forms they often take – especially in photographs circulated by international news agencies, on websites, in newspapers or in magazines, effectively drown out other ways of imagining freedom and justice and persuade us that they are general truths.

One example of the production of a geopolitical collective that has been defined as the custodian of 'multicultural' good, is the way South Africa has been imagined and portrayed as a refuge for gender-non-conforming people and sexual minorities. In similar ways to the invention of Israel as a gay haven of sexual rights and gender justice in the Middle East (see Schuman 2011), South Africa has been branded as a regional geopolitical sanctuary in relation to other African countries, whose laws often criminalise homosexuality and gender-non-conformity.

The photograph below, from an NGO focusing on the rights of asylum seekers, in many ways illustrates the country's role as a regional sanctuary. Typical of the visual imagination of South Africa's rights-based freedoms *vis-à-vis* African countries to the north, it conveys a festive sense of cultural inclusion around the annual gay pride march in Cape Town.

Figure 1: PASSOP volunteers at the Gay Pride Parade in Cape Town

Cape Town's pride parade has been one of several cultural innovations since the mid-1990s. These changes have, in some senses, deepened democracy regionally by ensuring that 'all cultures' participate in the celebration of sexual rights associated with Africa's 'gay capital'. Yet Cape Town's pride march also celebrates the leisure, sexual and psychosocial needs of privileged and mainly white South African and foreign gays. The print and online marketing of the parade reinforces its appeal as an event for pleasure and leisure among wealthy gays, with this lifestyle being clearly celebrated (see Figure 1). It is worth noting that the leisure economy constructed around privileged gay consumption and pleasure in Cape Town is huge. On the one hand, heterosexual capital has seized on the idea of the limitlessness of pink money and consumption. On the other, the resources, infrastructure, spaces and information for privileged gays form a vast commercial enterprise, since gays are seen to rely on this arsenal to navigate spaces generally seen as unsafe, underground and illicit.

South Africa, and in particular Cape Town, can therefore be thought about along lines suggested by Jon Binnie and Beverley Skeggs in their discussion of neoliberalism, sexual politics and urban policy. Binnie and Skeggs (2006, 32) comment on the branding of Manchester in the UK as a gay village, a post-industrial leisure idyll where 'freedom for gays and lesbians with buying power is central to national economic growth and capitalism'. As Figure 1 indicates, many images and messages about South Africa's sexual rights culture therefore direct the promise of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) aspirations and freedoms at socially privileged gays and lesbians. Such privileges include gay-friendly urban planning in designated areas, capital investment in the provision of leisure sites and opportunities, secure and well-policed living spaces, infrastructure, and information for guaranteeing physical security and personal well-being. All of these ensure rights to sexual freedom, privacy, pleasure, leisure and security for gays with buying power.

These rights are most definitely not realisable for many LGBTI immigrants from other countries seeking asylum, or poor gays and lesbians, including many living in Cape Town's townships. For these gay people, rights to pleasure, leisure and security are heavily circumscribed by financial deprivation, and often by racial discrimination as well. In fact, facilities such as shelters for gays and lesbians, and gay-friendly community or health centres are resources which neither municipal nor national government, let alone capital, is prepared to finance. Maybe even more important than middle-class gay privileges not being accessible to the majority of South Africa's gays and lesbians, is the fact that these rights may not constitute definitive freedoms for these groups. The refuge that South Africa offers is therefore an assimilationist one. It offers 'other' LGBTI people the right to belong on *its* terms, reducing all LGBTI struggles and activism simply to the quest for equality in a world that straight, white and middle-class people have.

The neoliberal underpinnings of many claims to rescue those who come 'from the peripheries' in multicultural societies are fairly obvious in actions, or when described in words. In a world of proliferating information, photographs and other visual messages

play an extremely important role in what Foucault defines as governmentality. As Foucault (2004, 28) puts it, governmentality involves the way that 'multiple bodies, forces, energies, matters, desires, thoughts and so on are gradually, progressively, actually and materially constituted as subjects'. It seems to be this shaping of subjectivities and naturalising of our sense of justice that is central to the power of the rescue narratives in collectivities – whether national or transnational – that are defined as multicultural.

CONCLUSION

Critiques of multiculturalism have often focused on the politics of its origins in managerial and governmental strategy; the role of multiculturalism in progressive politics and scholarship on sexual and gender justice seems to be strikingly different. Yet, even when multiculturalism promises to deepen democratic struggles and our understanding of these, it can hierarchise geopolitical identities in insidiously seductive ways. Visual representations of 'cultures', 'cultural difference', 'cultural diversity' and 'cultural inclusion', which currently play pivotal roles in defining and legitimating democratic struggles and freedoms, persuasively naturalise these hierarchised geopolitical identities.

Waves of injustice based on gender and sexuality – but also linked to neo-imperialism, global capitalism and hegemony – continue to require the concerted global political action of scholars and activists. Yet models of multiculturalism are unlikely to take us far in unraveling these complex dynamics, and more productive methodological, theoretical and conceptual leads are offered by feminists who insist on auto-reflexivity, standpoint epistemology, non-assimilationism, and the differential power positions of voices that struggle for *and* lay claims to defining 'democracy'.

A RESPONSE TO ANNE PHILLIPS

Louise du Toit

Will Kymlicka (1996, 76) describes the concept of a 'societal culture', which we normally refer to in the context of multiculturalism, as 'a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life' and 'encompassing both public and private spheres'; such cultures are typically territorially concentrated and 'based on a shared language'. The idea that societal cultures must be at least partially institutionalised in order to survive – in schools, media, economy and government – is a modern idea tied up with the logic of nation-states. To add to the dilemmas created by the notion of the nation-state, Kymlicka emphasises that modernisation always involves standardisation and the 'diffusion throughout a society of a common culture, including a standardized language, embodied in common economic, political and educational institutions' (ibid, 76). Such standardisation operates both within cultural groups and within multicultural nation-states.

Such standardisation is necessary for reasons such as the modern capitalist economy's need for 'a mobile, educated, and literate work-force', the democratic state's 'need for a high level of solidarity', common identity and common citizenship, as well as for the 'modern commitment to equality of opportunity' (ibid, 77). These insights are valuable in that they help us to see that (i) all human life is always and everywhere cultural life; thus typical claims by Western liberals that they are freer from culture than non-Westerners, or that they are impossibly free-floating and 'self-made', are nothing less than a self-deception made possible by the way in which such people's cultures pervade the social institutions that rule their lives (or, inversely, the extent to which they have successfully tailored their individual lives to fit into the dominant social institutions) and (ii) so-called multicultural claims represent a contestation over the cultural identity of the dominant social institutions in a society.

Cultural identity and belonging are at the same time the most personal (and emotionally charged) of issues and the most political. Kymlicka (ibid, 89) casts light on one important reason for the first of these: cultural identification 'is based on belonging, not accomplishment', which means that cultural identification is much more secure than identifications that depend upon achievements or specific interests. This means that cultural identity is, in nature and 'feel', more similar to being part of a family than to being a member of a club or a profession. Cultural identity is thus an important aspect of secure (and fairly effortless) belonging, while at the same time one's self-respect and dignity are closely bound up with the 'esteem in which [one's] national group is held' (ibid.) – hence the political aspect. Cultural claims are therefore clearly symbolic: they demand the basic human good of recognition. At the same time, however, they are thoroughly material, since claims for public recognition cannot be divorced from the extent to which specific cultures are or are not institutionalised within the nation-state which, ultimately, governs all citizens' lives. In South Africa, for instance, since 1994 we have seen a consolidation of the powers of traditional leaders over land and over women's bodies, resulting in a significant growth in control over actual material resources.[3] Such material success lends renewed credibility to specific (misogynist) interpretations of cultural identity, as well as to a renewed interest from individuals to align themselves with such groups. Cultural claims are never innocent, since they contest the distribution of power. Similarly, when feminists, queers and others contest dominant cultural claims and promote alternative interpretations of their traditions, such claims equally aim at the redistribution of power – this time not between, but rather within, cultural groups.

The 'especially challenging moment' Anne Phillips mentions in the interview that opens this conversation refers to the opportunistic and disingenuous 'alliance', which typically non-feminist, Western, capitalist and masculinist elites increasingly attempt to forge between the counter-cultural claims of feminists and their own attempt to close down altogether the legitimacy of certain multicultural claims made in the face of Western homogeneity. She refers in this regard to a European workshop where

feminists found themselves fighting harder against the cynical Western cooptation of feminism than against the anti-feminist cultural claims emanating from non-Western cultural groups. The point here is clearly that even while feminists internationally seek ways to build solidarity amongst feminists 'within' and 'outside' the (Western and non-Western) cultures being criticised, there should also be an unambiguous rejection of what Phillips calls 'the misuse of the language of women's rights to stereotype and attack minority groups'. Feminism is, as she says, per definition 'a struggle against culture', and a position or perspective on the world attained through a process of often painful defamiliarisation and distantiation from the everyday, pervasive aspects of patriarchy within one's own cultural life. This is so since even feminists have necessarily grown up in misogynist cultures. But I would qualify her phrase and say that feminism is per definition a struggle against reified interpretations of culture.

On the one hand, then, feminist critiques of dominant misogynist cultural meanings and practices must be unashamedly critical, by which I mean that as feminists we should systematically employ critical tools of analysis to illuminate the myriad ways in which all cultures and religions tend to favour cultural interpretations of meanings in both private and public spaces that serve to justify the exploitation of women's labour and sexuality. Feminists of all cultural groups must work tirelessly to expose the ideological (patriarchal) dimensions of dominant cultural claims, wherever they occur. In this project, it is especially important for feminists to expose Western cultural beliefs and claims *as cultural beliefs*, rather than as a-historical, objective, universal or naturalised truths. Feminists must cooperate across nations and cultures to expose the globally dominant cultural claims and counter-claims for what they are: finally devoid of any real concern for women's interests, voices, meanings, values or perspectives.

But if, as I claimed, nobody can finally escape from their cultural horizons, although they may be temporarily alienated from them through the cultivation of a critical consciousness such as feminism, where then do the resources come from for challenging misogynist cultural claims and practices? It seems to me that such resources reside in the simple fact that every human being has the capacity to bring meaning and value into the world. That is to say that we all have the capacity to create for ourselves a world in the material and symbolic senses of the word, even if the only materials for doing so are the materials already available in the shared human world. Although we inherit an existing and already interpreted world, every human has the inalienable capacity to reinterpret, recreate and re-order that world. Hannah Arendt uses the word 'natality' to point to this capacity for novelty, regeneration and for starting something radically new. Each interpretation is radically unstable, and cultures (as Phillips and many others have argued) are not coherent wholes, neither are they insular or static. To 'have' a culture or to belong to a religion thus means, inevitably, to take the responsibility of participating in a dynamic process of rethinking anew what one's culture or religion could possibly mean in new circumstances, or viewed from the perspective of marginalised lived realities.

Nevertheless, to accept the historical, dynamic and interpretative nature of cultures and religions, and to honour everyone's capacity to participate in cultural interpretation, to open up the space for critical and creative contestation over cultural meaning/s is fundamentally at odds with the desire to assert cultures as timeless, universal or absolute, with the view to extend cultural elites' control over resources. The 'challenging moment' referred to by Phillips entails that feminism has been coopted in the latter struggle, to the great detriment of both women and the living cultures they belong to. The strategy followed by both the West and the 'rest' to couch cultural claims in a-historic terms can only lead to the escalation of violent conflict on a global scale. The best antidote to this imminent danger is a global alliance in which feminists take as their point of departure that feminist men and women from all cultures are a rich resource for informing, critiquing, and expanding our understanding of what forms feminist resistance and transformation may take, and what a feminist, multicultural world might look like. The dynamism, contestation and historicity feminists (should) attribute to all cultural claims must also be consistently applied to the feminist tradition and counter-culture itself, so that feminist politics can allow maximally for internal diversity and contestation.

CULTURE, COSMOPOLITANISM AND DISTINCTION IN *GQ* MAGAZINE

Stella Viljoen

'We need a multiculturalism "without culture": a multiculturalism that can acknowledge and respect difference without falling into the determinism and simplification of culture' (Phillips 2007, 30). Anne Phillips' insistence on 'multiculturalism without culture' is a preference for a notion of culture that is mediated by individual choice, whether conscious or unconscious, private or public. That these choices sometimes occur corporately means that the degree of personal agency involved in culture is often unseen, even by the subject. 'I would prefer us to stop talking about cultures (as if there are "things" called cultures)', Phillips says in her interview with Deirdre Byrne, 'and just talk about cultural influences or cultural meanings'. In this brief response to the interview, I hope to consider taste as a manifestation of what we call 'culture'. In particular, my emphasis falls on *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (or *GQ*), a glossy men's magazine that serves as an example of taste training for a generation of South African men who are perhaps a little insecure about choices of an aesthetic or social kind.

GQ first appeared in 1957 in the United States, but, in its earliest incarnation, was a trade publication called *Apparel Arts*, begun in New York City in 1931. The magazine helped retailers to advise male customers on fashion and style, so from its inception was focused on perpetuating an aspirational aesthetic, connected to class. It was only in 1983 that the publication was sold to Condé Nast and rebranded as *GQ*, a magazine that is now published in 19 countries and perpetuates a globalising visual rhetoric and

male gaze.[4] The South African edition was launched in 2000, at a time when South Africans were grappling with the visual dimensions of South African-ness and how this was to be interpreted on an individual level. I have argued elsewhere that in the 1990s amendments to South African public policy (specifically on employment equity) brought a far-reaching realisation that change was needed to reform the prejudicial apartheid legislation of the past (see Viljoen 2008). Other than an optimistic sense of flux, it is difficult to define the tone of the mid- to late 1990s, but it was out of this scene that at least three international men's magazines launched local editions, almost as if to answer the collective question of what renewed and refreshed masculinities might emerge from the ashes of a seemingly vapid patriarchy.

However progressive a dominant ideal may seem, Phillips reminds us that 'if you're in a society that contains a diversity of cultures … it's not appropriate to expect everyone to adopt the values, practices, and traditions of the dominant majority group' (in Edmonds and Warburton 2010, 68). Multiple masculinities then need articulation in the public sphere and one cannot help but ask how glamour magazines like *GQ* will 'regulate the lives and activities of members in particular ways' (Phillips 2007, 31). Phillips' stated cosmopolitanism, however 'reluctant', probably results from her belief in affirming cultural multiplicity on the one hand, and rejecting a too-strong nationalism on the other. But what is to be made of 'distinction' styled as cosmopolitanism?

Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 5, 41) asserts that it is the preserve of the privileged classes to be able to encounter the world by means of a pure gaze, whilst the underclasses consider cultural objects as having to fulfil some sort of function other than appearance. The acceptance of the gentrifying mien and aesthetic distinction of glossy magazines like *GQ* by a bourgeoning class of upwardly mobile South African men might be just the sort of symbolic violence Bourdieu argues against. While the magazine provides its readers with apparently useful advice on how to dress, date and shop, it does so in the most essentialising way, providing no room for DIY articulations of culture or fissures in the aspirational norm. As in most women's magazines, conspicuous consumption is promoted as the means by which to attain the gleam of 'culture' but in men's magazines like *GQ*, women form part of the universe of goods that arouse interest in the consumer and promote his gaze to that of connoisseur. Here culture is monochrome and prescriptive, a glossy vacuum named cosmopolitanism.

Phillips (2007, 31) bemoans the ways in which the project of multiculturalism has led to an understanding of cultures as more distinct from one another than they probably are. She describes this ironic turn of events as partly responsible for the backlash against multiculturalism, highlighting the manner in which particularly 'non-Western groups are [thought to be] driven by their culture or compelled by various dictates to behave in particular ways' (2007, 31).[5] It is possible that some of *GQ*'s success in South Africa can be attributed to the leverage it offers readers who wish to cast off the stigma of stereotype and 'culture' in favour of the invisibility offered by a globalised Western taste. To the extent that this is true, *GQ*, as an instance of culture, is the epitome of bad taste.

NOTES

1. I am using 'racial culture' and 'group culture' interchangeably here, but it needs to be borne in mind that culture in South Africa is constructed by race as well as ethnicity (ethnic or linguistic groups). It is analytically very difficult to tease out the difference between racial and group culture.
2. Conservatives here are defined as those in Western neoliberal democracies who believe that Western values and political systems are threatened by non-Westerners and immigrants seeking to retain or adhere to distinct religious, cultural and political beliefs.
3. Political scientist Shireen Hassim made this point during a recent workshop on culture and gender held at the University of Stellenbosch.
4. The move towards privilege (in the most literal sense, a higher LSM) is often a move toward a political preference for cosmopolitanism, but this persuasion is typically visualised by the mainstream media as a set of predictable and homogenising surfaces.
5. Thus xenophobia may be described as resulting from an ethnic mountain dividing different cultural groupings within the underclasses.

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