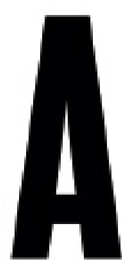
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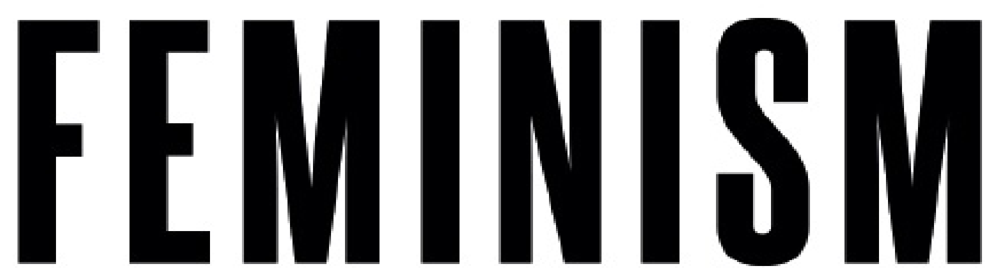
FEMINISM

FRANÇOISE VERGÈS

A Decolonial Feminism

‘A vibrant and compelling framework for feminism in our times.’

—Judith Butler

‘A powerful tool of social transformation.’

—Djamila Ribeiro, Brazilian human rights activist and author of *Nos, Madelenas: uma palavra pelo feminism*

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—*Axelle n°219*

A Decolonial Feminism

Françoise Vergès

Translated by
Ashley J. Bohrer with the author

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1
Taking Sides: Decolonial Feminism

The turn in feminism, from being long condemned by right-wing ideologies, to becoming one of their spearheads, is worthy of analysis. What is at stake in this ideological deployment? How did this change occur? How did we move from a feminism that was indifferent or ambivalent to racial and colonial issues in the Francophone world, to a white and imperialist feminism? What is femonationalism all about? How has feminism become, in a significant convergence, one of the pillars of several ideologies—liberal, nationalist-xenophobic, extreme right-wing—that, at first glance, are opposed to one another? How has the issue of women's rights become one of the trump cards played by the state and imperialism, one of neoliberalism's last recourses, and the spearhead of the civilizing mission of white, bourgeois feminism? This feminism and these xenophobic-nationalist currents do not profess to having shared objectives, but they do share common *points of convergence*, and it is these that interest us here.[1]

This book wishes to be a contribution to the critical works of feminists in the Global South and their allies in the North on gender, feminism, women's struggles, and the critique of civilizational feminism. I call this feminism 'civilizational' because, in the name of an ideology of women's rights, it has undertaken the mission of imposing a unique perspective that contributes to the perpetuation of domination based on class, gender, and race. I defend a decolonial feminism whose objective is the destruction of racism, capitalism, and imperialism, an agenda I will try to define more clearly.

"Feminism involves so much more than gender equality. And it involves so much more than gender," Angela Davis explains.[2] It also goes beyond the category of 'women' based on biological determinism, and it restores a radical political dimension to the notion of women's rights: taking into account the challenges faced by a humanity threatened with extinction. I take a stance against a temporality that describes liberation only in terms of unilateral

'victory' against the reactionary. Such a perspective shows an "enormous condescension of posterity"[3] towards those who are defeated. Writing history this way turns the story of oppressed peoples' struggles into one of successive defeats, imposing a linearity in which any setback is taken as proof that the fight was badly conducted (which is, of course, possible), rather than one that exposes the determination of reactionary and imperialist forces to crush any dissent. This is what songs of struggle—Black spirituals, revolutionary songs, gospel songs, songs of slaves and colonized people—recount: the long road to freedom, a never-ending struggle, revolution as daily work. It is in this temporality that I situate decolonial feminism.

Reclaiming Feminism

The term 'feminist' is not always easy to claim. The betrayals of Western feminism are its own deterrent, as are its heartless desire to integrate into the capitalist world and take its place in the world of predatory men and its obsession with the sexuality of racialized men and the victimization of racialized women. Why call yourself 'feminist,' why defend feminism, when these terms are so corrupted that even the far right can appropriate them? What do you do when the words 'feminist' and 'feminism' are now part of the arsenal of the modernizing neoliberal right wing when, even just a decade ago, they still held radical potential and were lobbed as insults? When, in France, a Minister organizes a "University of Feminism"[4] event in which the majority of the audience is female and claims to be feminist, yet they still jeer at a young, veiled woman and let a man lecture them for 25 minutes (roundly condemned only on Twitter)? What is feminism about once it becomes an exercise in appeasement? If feminism and feminists are in the service of capital, the state, and empire, is it still possible to breathe life back into them, by reanimating the movement with the objectives of social justice, dignity, respect, and the politics of life against the politics of death? But shouldn't we also defend feminism against the onslaught of fascist forces? When rape and murder are not only acceptable but also encouraged weapons to discipline women? When even being a blond woman, a mother, married to a man, a university professor, conforming to all of the standards of white, middle-class respectability, is no protection against the

explosion of hatred, as we saw with the hearing of Christine Blasey Ford during the debates on the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the United States Supreme Court? Or when various governments across the world turn feminism into an anti-national ideology, foreign to 'the culture of the nation,' to better repress women? For a long time, I did not call myself a feminist; instead I described myself as an anti-colonial and anti-racist activist in women's liberation movements. I have been led to call myself a feminist, on the one hand because of the re-emergence of a feminism based in broad, transnational, pluralist, decolonial politics, and on the other because of the capture of women's struggles by civilizational feminism.

An Anti-Colonial Trajectory

Biography does not explain everything, and often, it does not explain very much at all, but in a book on feminism I owe it to myself to say something about my own trajectory, not because it is at all exemplary, but because women's struggles have played a major role in it. I was, for many years, an activist inside women's liberation groups; these struggles were always linked to more general liberation projects, in my own case, to the liberation from post-1962 French colonialism. My interest, curiosity, and commitment to emancipatory struggles is grounded in the political and cultural education I received on Réunion Island.[5] As a little girl who was raised in a context where school, media, and cultural activities were all subject to the post-1962 French colonial order, my experience was exceptionally transnational. For a long time, I did not call myself a feminist activist, but rather a 'women's liberation activist'. I had the privilege of growing up in a family of feminist and anti-colonial communists, being surrounded by activists of different backgrounds, religions, and genders, who gave me an insight into the meaning of struggle and solidarity, and I discovered the joy and happiness of collective struggle. As a teenager, I was the kind of idealist who could not stand the idea of setback and defeat; I wanted heroism and the crushing of the enemy. My parents' answer to my naïve and sentimental idealism brought me back to earth: "They are brutes, fascists, scoundrels. You can't expect anything from them. They don't respect any rights, especially our right to exist." There was nothing defeatist in these remarks; rather, they contained a lesson on another temporality

of struggle: iconic, though complex, images of the capture of the Winter Palace, of Castro's troops entering Havana, of the National Liberation Army in Algiers. These were powerful images capable of mobilizing my imagination; but if I stopped at these images, I risked living in perpetual disillusionment. Tomorrow, the struggle would continue. I also learned very early on that if the state wants to crush a movement, it will use all the means and resources at its disposal both to repress and to divide the oppressed. With one hand it strikes and with the other, it tries to assimilate. Fear is one of the state's favorite weapons to produce conformity and consent, and I quickly understood the price to be paid for defying these rules, summarized thus: "Don't stand out, don't protest too much, and you won't get into trouble." The Debré Ordinance of 1960[6] demonstrated this in exiling 13 anti-colonial Réunionese activists (including union leaders). The message was clear: all dissident voices would be punished. The Réunionese historian Prosper Ève has spoken of "the island of fear" to analyze how slavery, post-slavery, and postcolonialism spread fear as a disciplinary technique well into the 1960s (and, I would add, to this day).[7] Fear is certainly not exclusive to the colonial system, but we should remember that colonial slavery was based on the constant threat of torture and death of human beings who were legally transformed into objects, and on the public spectacle of putting them to death. I learned also that one must use the laws of the state against the state itself, but without illusion or idealism, as understood by the enslaved women who fought to win free status, which they passed on to their children, or by the colonized people who used the colonial state's own laws against it (demanding freedom of the press, freedom of association, the right to vote, etc.). This strategy was always accompanied by a critique of the racial colonial state and its institutions. In other words, I understood that struggles are played on multiple fields and for objectives with different temporalities. The existence of a vast world where resistance and a refusal to yield to an unjust global order was part of the worldview that had been passed down to me. It was not when I arrived in France or went to university that I discovered that capitalism, racism, sexism, and imperialism are fellow travelers, and I did not first encounter anti-colonial or anti-racist feminism by reading Simone de Beauvoir; I have been surrounded by it since early childhood.

The False Innocence of White Feminism

Following Frantz Fanon, who wrote, “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World,” because it was built on plundering the world’s wealth, and therefore “the wealth of imperialist countries is also our wealth,”[8] I can say that France is literally the creation of its colonial empire, and the North a creation of the South. I am therefore always surprised by the stubborn way in which slavery, colonialism, and everything related to the ‘overseas’ territories are overlooked in the analysis of contemporary France and the policies of its successive governments since the 1950s. Even more so than the colonial empire, the ‘overseas’ departments[9] (former slave societies or post-slave colonies) are excluded from contemporary history; no text on political issues, whether in philosophy, economy, or sociology, is interested in these remnants of the French colonial empire. This implies a desire to erase these peoples and their countries from the analysis of conflicts, contradictions, and resistance. What is the purpose of such repression if not to maintain the idea that all of this—slavery, colonialism, imperialism—certainly happened, but by being *outside* of France proper, it did not really matter? It undermines the links between capitalism and racism, between sexism and racism, and preserves French innocence. French feminism keeps its colonial and slave heritage at a distance. We are supposed to believe that since women are victims of masculine domination they have no responsibility for the racist policies deployed by the French State.

Feminism as a Struggle for the Right to Exist

To call oneself a decolonial feminist, to defend feminisms with decolonial politics today, is not only to tear the word ‘feminism’ out of the greedy hands of reactionaries’ empty ideologies. It is also to affirm our fidelity to the struggles of the women of the Global South who have come before us. It is to recognize their sacrifices, honor their lives in all their complexity, the risks they took, and the difficulties and frustrations they experienced; it is to receive their legacy. On the other hand, it means recognizing that the offensive against women that is now openly justified and acknowledged by state leaders is not simply an expression of a brazen, masculinist dominance, but a manifestation of the destructive

violence generated by capitalism. Decolonial feminism leads to de-patriarchalizing revolutionary struggles. In other words, feminisms with decolonial politics contribute to the struggle, undertaken for centuries by part of humanity, to assert its *right to existence.*

Feminisms with Decolonial Politics[10]

One of the significant developments of this still young twenty-first century, and one that has been growing in strength for several years, is the movement of decolonial feminisms the world over. This current has developed a multitude of practices, experiences, and theories; the most encouraging and original are the movements for land rights that address issues in a transversal and intersectional way. Unsurprisingly, this movement provokes violent reaction from heteropatriarchs, feminists in the North, and governments. It is in the Global South that these movements have developed, reactivating the memory of previous feminist struggles which have never been lost because they have never been abandoned, despite the terrible attacks against them. Joined by feminists in Spain, France, and the United States, these movements declare war on racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism through mass demonstrations in Argentina, India, Mexico, and Palestine. These activists denounce rape and femicide, linking this struggle to the fight against policies of dispossession, colonization, extractivism, and the systematic destruction of the living.

This is not a ‘new wave’ or a ‘new generation,’ according to the favored formulas that mask the multiple lives of women’s movements. It is rather a new stage in the process of decolonization, which we all know is a long historical process. These two formulas—wave and generation—contribute to erasing the long underground work that allows forgotten traditions to be reborn and obscures the fact that these currents have been buried; this metaphor also confers historical responsibility on a mechanism (‘wave’) or a demographic phenomenon (‘generation’). Decolonial feminisms reject these segmenting formulas because these politics rest on the long history of the struggles of their elders: Indigenous women during colonization, enslaved women, Black women, women involved in the struggles for national liberation and the feminist subaltern internationalism of the 1950s–1970s, and racialized women who

struggle daily even today.

Decolonial feminist movements, along with other decolonial movements and all movements for emancipation, are facing a period of acceleration in capitalism, which now regulates the functioning of its old accomplice, liberal democracy. These movements must find alternatives to economic absolutism and the infinite manufacture of goods. Our struggles are a threat to the authoritarian regimes that accompany the economic absolutism of capitalism. They also threaten masculinist domination, which is afraid of having to give up power—and which, everywhere, shows its proximity to fascistic forces. Our struggles also undermine civilizational feminism, which, having made women's rights into an ideology of assimilation and integration into the neoliberal order, reduces women's revolutionary aspirations to an equal share of the privileges granted to white men by white supremacy. As active accomplices of the racial capitalist order, civilizational feminists do not hesitate to support imperialist intervention policies, as well as Islamophobic and even "Negrophobic" policies.[11]

The stakes are high and the danger is dire. It is a question of opposing authoritarian nationalism and neo-fascism, both of which see racialized feminists as enemies to be destroyed. Western democracy will no longer even claim to protect us once the interests of capitalism are truly threatened. Capitalist absolutism encourages all regimes that allow it to impose its own rules and methods, open previously un-colonized spaces to it, and grant it access to the ownership of water, air, and land.

The rise of reactionaries of all kinds shows one thing loud and clear: a feminism that fights only for gender equality and refuses to see how integration leaves racialized women at the mercy of brutality, violence, rape, and murder, is ultimately complicit in it. This is the lesson to be learned from the election of a white man, supported by major landowners, the business world, and the evangelical churches, to the presidency of Brazil in October 2018. This is a man who openly declared his misogyny, homophobia, Negrophobia, and contempt for Indigenous people. This is a man who openly declared his willingness to sell Brazil to the highest bidder, to trample on social laws that protect the poorest classes and on those that protect nature, and to renege on the agreements signed with Amerindian peoples—and all of this came just a few months after the assassination of queer, Black, elected city councilor Marielle Franco. A simple

approach to gender equality reveals its own limits when parties of the authoritarian right and far-right elect women as leaders or choose them as muses —Sarah Palin, Marine Le Pen, Giorgia Meloni…

Critique of Epistemicides

In Fernando Solanas' magnificent film *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), the following phrase appears: "the price we pay to be humanized." Indeed, the price we pay has always been high, and remains so. We are fighting against a system that has dismissed scientific knowledge, aesthetics, and entire categories of human beings as non-existent. Although the European world never succeeded in being completely hegemonic, it appropriated without hesitation or shame the knowledge, aesthetics, techniques, and philosophies of the people it enslaved and whose civilizations it denied. The rhetoric and practices of the colonial civilizing mission are still used to justify and legitimize the politics of theft. Without denying the complexities and contradictions of centuries of European colonialism (or what has escaped its surveillance techniques) and without overlooking the techniques of borrowing and *détournement* that colonized people have used as well, an in-depth understanding of South–South exchanges (cultural, technical, and scientific) is still lacking. In large part, this lack is due to research funding policies. The struggle for epistemic justice, which is to say, a struggle that demands equality between knowledges and contests the order of knowledge imposed by the West, is central. Decolonial feminisms are part of the long movement of scientific and philosophical reappropriation that is revising the European narrative of the world. They contest the Western-patriarchal economic ideology that turned women, Black people, Indigenous people, and people from Asia and Africa into inferior beings marked by the absence of reason, beauty, or a mind capable of technical and scientific discovery. This ideology has provided the basis for development policies that essentially say: "You are underdeveloped, but you can be developed if you adopt our technologies, our ways of solving social and economic problems. You must imitate our democracies, the best system, because you do not know what freedom, respect for the law, or the separation of powers is." This ideology nourishes civilizational feminism which says, in essence, to women: "You don't

have freedom. You don’t know your rights. We will help you reach the right level of development.” The work of rediscovering and valuing knowledge, philosophies, literature, and imagination does not begin with us, but one of our missions is to make the effort to know and disseminate them. Feminist activists know the transmission of struggles can often be broken; they are often faced with ignorance of struggles and resistance movements. They often hear “our parents bowed their heads; they let themselves be pushed around.” The history of feminist struggle is full of holes, approximations, and generalities. Decolonial feminist activists and academics have understood the need to develop their own modes of transmission and knowledge; through blogs, films, exhibitions, festivals, meetings, artworks, pieces of theater and dance, song, and music, through circulating stories and texts, through translating, publishing, and filming, they have made their movements and the historic figures of those movements known. It is a movement that should be highlighted, in particular, by making the effort to translate texts from the African continent, Europe, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia into many languages.

What Is Coloniality?

Among the main avenues of struggle pursued by a decolonial feminism, it is necessary first of all to highlight the fight against police violence and the accelerated militarization of society. These are underpinned by an idea of protection entrusted to the army and a classed/racialized concept of justice that the police are tasked with carrying out. This implies rejecting carceral and punitive feminism, which is satisfied with a judicial approach to violence that does not question the deaths of racialized women and men, since it is considered ‘natural,’ a cultural fact, an accident, or just a sad occurrence in our democracies. Efforts must be made to denounce systemic violence against women and transgender people, but we must do so without pitting victims against each other; we must analyze the production of racialized bodies without forgetting violence against transgender people and sex workers. We must de-nationalize and decolonize the narrative of white, bourgeois feminism without obscuring internationalist, anti-racist feminist networks. We must be attentive to policies of cultural appropriation and be wary of powerful institutions’ attraction

to ‘diversity.’ We should not underestimate the speed with which capital is able to absorb ideas and turn them into empty slogans. Why wouldn’t capital be able to incorporate the idea of decolonization or decoloniality? Capital is a colonizer; the colony is consubstantial with it. In order to understand the colony’s endurance, it is necessary to free oneself from an approach that sees the colony exclusively through the form Europe gave it in the nineteenth century. It is also necessary not to confuse colonization with colonialism. Peter Ekeh makes this helpful distinction: colonization is an event or a period, while colonialism is a process or a movement, a total social movement whose perpetuation is explained by the persistence of social formations resulting from this order.[12] Decolonial feminists study the way in which the complex of racism/sexism/ethnocentrism pervades all relations of domination, even when the regimes associated with these phenomena have disappeared. The notion of coloniality is extremely important for analyzing contemporary France, at a time when so, so many, even on the left, still believe colonialism is over. According to this narrative, decolonization simply put an end to colonialism. However, in addition to the fact that the Republic continues to have control over dependent territories, the institutions of power are still structured by racism. For decolonial feminisms in France, analyzing the coloniality of the French Republic remains central. It is a coloniality that inherits the division of the world that Europe traced in the sixteenth century and that has continually asserted through the sword, the pen, the faith, the whip, torture, threat, law, text, painting, and later, photography and cinema. It is a coloniality that establishes a politics of disposable life, of *humans as waste*.

However, we cannot limit our discussion to the space-time of the European narrative. The history of decolonization is also that of the longstanding struggles that have shaken up the world order. Since the sixteenth century, people have fought against Western colonization (for example, the struggles of Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans, and the Haitian Revolution). Moreover, erasing the South–South transfers and routes of liberation and obscuring the internationalist experiences of anti-colonial forces suggests that decolonization has meant nothing more than independence under the law, and even that decolonization is a ploy. Ignorance of the circulation of people, ideas, and emancipatory practices within the Global South preserves the hegemony of the

North–South axis; and yet, South–South exchanges have been crucial for the spread of dreams of liberation. These spatio-temporal re-readings are essential to stimulate the imagination of decolonial feminists.

Against Eurocentrism

To give our criticism the necessary scope, we must go so far as to say that civilizational feminism is born with the colony, insofar as European feminists develop a discourse of their own oppression by comparing themselves to slaves. The metaphor of slavery was a powerful one, for weren't women the property of their fathers and husbands? Were they not subordinated to the sexist laws of the church and the state? But, European Enlightenment feminism did not recognize the women who participated in the Haitian Revolution (which would be subsequently celebrated by the Romantic poets), nor did it recognize the enslaved women who revolted, resisted, or participated in *marronnage*.[13] The question here is not about passing judgment in retrospect, but about asking, in regard to this blindness and indifference, why the critical analysis of the racial genealogy of European feminism is still marginal. Rewriting the history of feminism from the colony is a central issue for decolonial feminism. We cannot simply consider the colony as a side issue of history. It is about considering that, without the colony, we would not have a France with structurally racist institutions. For racialized women in the North and the Global South, all aspects of their lives, the risks they face, the price they pay for misogyny, sexism, and patriarchy remain to be studied and made visible. To fight against femoimperialism is to bring the lives of 'anonymous' women back from silence, to reject the process of pacification, and to analyze why and how women's rights have become an ideological weapon in the service of neoliberalism (which can also fully support a misogynistic, homophobic, and racist regime). When women's rights are reduced to the defense of individual freedom—'to be free to, to have the right to…'—without questioning the content of this freedom, without questioning the genealogy of this notion in European modernity, we are entitled to wonder whether all these rights were granted because other women were not free. The narrative of civilizational feminism continues to be contained in the space of European modernity and never takes into account the fact that it is

based on the denial of the role of slavery and colonialism in its own formation. The solution is not giving a place (even a marginal one) to enslaved, colonized, and racialized women, or those from overseas. What is on the agenda is how Western feminisms have been imbued with the division of the world that slavery and colonialism have enacted since the sixteenth century (between a humanity that has the right to live and one that can die). If feminism remains based on the division between women and men (a division that precedes slavery), but does not analyze how slavery, colonialism, and imperialism affect this division—nor how Europe imposes its conception of the division between women and men on the peoples it colonizes or how this division creates others—then this feminism is racist. Europe remains its center, and all its analyses begin from this part of the world: the colonial roots of fascism are forgotten, racial capitalism is not a category of analysis, enslaved and colonized women are not perceived as constituting the negative mirror-image of European women. Rare are the European feminists who have been resolutely anti-racist and anti-colonial. There have, of course, been exceptions—journalists, lawyers, activists who declared their solidarity with colonized people, but it has not constituted the basis of French feminism, despite its indebtedness to anti-racist struggles. Even the support for the Algerian nationalists that has been so important to French feminists has not led to an analysis of the boomerang effect described by Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism*: "Colonization works to decivilize the colonizer."[14] Speaking of civilizational feminism or white, bourgeois feminism, has in this sense, a very specific meaning. It is not 'white' simply because white women adopt it, but because it claims to belong to the part of the world, Europe, that was built on a racialized division of the world. It is bourgeois because it does not attack racial capitalism. We are entitled to ask this question: how, why, and by what means could European feminism have avoided being affected by centuries of racial laws, imperialist domination, and the ideology of white supremacy? Since racism is too often conflated with the extreme right, pogroms, and ghettos in Europe, we often do not pay enough attention to the extent to which racism also spread and disseminated quietly and dispassionately, through the naturalization of the state of racialized servitude and the idea that some civilizations have been incompatible with progress and the rights of women. Saving racialized women from 'obscurantism' remains one of the main

principles of civilizational feminisms. This policy was aimed at women in the colonies and at racialized and working-class women domestically. We cannot deny that for some, these actions were based on a desire to do the 'right thing,' they were driven by a strong belief in the righteousness of their feelings and of their desire to improve the condition of women; nor can we deny that some colonized people benefited from their actions. But there is a difference between aid and radical criticism of colonialism and capitalism, and between aid and fighting against exploitation and injustice. Or, to quote Australian Indigenous activist Lilla Watson: "If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."[15]

For a Critical Decolonial Pedagogy

The theories and practices forged within the anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial struggles are invaluable resources. Decolonial feminisms bring the following to other struggles that share the goal of re-humanizing the world: their library of knowledge, their experience of practices, and their anti-racist and anti-sexist theories, which are thoroughly linked to anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist struggles. A feminist cannot claim to possess *the* theory and *the* method; she seeks to be multidimensional and intersecting. She asks herself what she does not see, she seeks to deconstruct the malignance of school education that has taught her not to see, feel, or know how to read, but to suffocate her senses, be divided within herself and be separated from her world. She must relearn how to hear, see, and feel in order to be able to think. She knows that the struggle is collective, and she knows that the determination of her enemies to defeat liberation struggles must not be underestimated, that they will use all the weapons at their disposal—censorship, defamation, threats, imprisonment, torture, and murder. She also knows that the struggle brings difficulties, tensions, and frustrations, but also joy and gaiety, discovery and expansion of the world.

Decolonial feminism is a feminism that offers a multidimensional analysis of oppression and refuses to divide race, sexuality, and class into mutually exclusive categories. Multidimensionality, a concept proposed by Darren Lenard

Hutchinson, responds to the limits of the notion of intersectionality in order to better understand how "racist and heteronormative power not only creates precise exclusions at the intersection of domination, but shapes all social proposals and subjectivities,"[16] including among those who are privileged. This notion echoes the 'feminism of totality,' a methodology that aims to take into account the *totality* of social relationships.[17] I share the importance given to the state and I adhere to a feminism that thinks about patriarchy, the state, *and* capital; reproductive justice, environmental justice, *and* criticism of the pharmaceutical industry; the rights of migrants, refugees, *and* the end of femicide; the fight against the Anthropocene, racial Capitalocene, *and* the criminalization of solidarity. It is not a question of connecting elements in a systematic and ultimately abstract way, but of making the effort to see if, and what, links exist. A multidimensional approach makes it possible to avoid a hierarchy of struggles based on a scale of urgency whose framework often remains dictated by prejudice. The challenge is to hold several threads at once, to override ideologically induced segmentation, and "to grasp how production and social reproduction are historically articulated."[18] This approach has guided me in my analysis of the thousands of abortions and sterilizations perpetrated annually on Réunion Island in the 1970s. If I had stopped at an explanation that only blamed the white, French doctors who performed them, I would have reduced the story to one about greed among a few white men. Rather, a study of all the elements highlighted a French State policy of natalism in France and of anti-natalism towards the racialized and poor women in its 'overseas' departments, a policy that was part of a global reconfiguration of Western birth-control policies in the context of national liberation struggles and the Cold War.[19] Similarly, in a presentation of a critical decolonial pedagogy,[20] I used a familiar fruit, the banana, to shed light on a number of analogies and elective affinities: the banana's dispersion from New Guinea to the rest of the world, the banana and slavery, the banana and US imperialism (banana republics), the banana and agribusiness (pesticides, insecticides—the chlordecone scandal in the Antilles), the banana and working conditions (the plantation regimes, sexual violence, repression), the banana and the environment (monocultures, polluted water and land), the banana and sexuality, the banana and music, the banana and performance (Josephine Baker), the banana and branding (Banana Republic), the

banana and racism (when did the association of bananas and Negrophobia begin?), the banana and science (researching the 'perfect' banana), the banana and consumption (bringing bananas into the home, suggesting recipes), the banana and rituals for ancestors, and the banana and contemporary art. The method is simple: starting from one element to uncover a political, economic, cultural, and social ecosystem in order to avoid the segmentation that the Western social-science method has imposed. The most enlightening and productive analyses in recent decades have been those that have drawn the greatest number of threads together to highlight the concrete and subjective networks of oppression that weave the web of exploitation and discrimination.

Decolonial Feminism as a Utopian Imaginary

In the context of a capitalism with increased destructive power, of racism, and of murderous sexism, this book affirms that, yes, feminism, which I call *decolonial feminism*, must be defended, developed, affirmed, and put into practice. *Maroon feminism* offers decolonial feminism a historical anchor in the struggles to resist the slave trade and enslavement. All the initiatives, actions, gestures, songs, rituals that night or day, hidden or visible, represent a radical promise, I understand as 'maroon'. *Marronnage* affirmed the possibility of a future, even when one was foreclosed by law, church, state, and culture, all of which proclaimed that there was no alternative to slavery, that slavery was as natural as day and night, that the exclusion of Blacks from humanity was a *natural* thing. The maroons tore the veil of lies by revealing the fictional aspect of these naturalizations. They created sovereign territories at the very heart of the system of slavery and proclaimed their freedom. Their dreams, their hopes, their utopias, as well as the reasons for their defeats, remain spaces we can turn to in order to think about action. Therefore, it is a utopia, in the sense of a radical promise, that constitutes a space from which to attack capitalism's proclamation that there is no alternative to its economy and ideology, that it is as natural as day and night, and its promises that technological and scientific solutions will transform its ruins into spaces of happiness. Against these ideologies, *marronnage* as a politics of disobedience affirms the existence of a futurity, to borrow a concept from Black American feminists. In claiming *marronnage*,

feminism anchors itself in questioning the naturalization of oppression; by claiming to be decolonial, it fights the coloniality of power. But is using the term ‘feminism’ the appropriate response to the rise of political fascism, capitalist predation, and the destruction of the ecological conditions necessary for living beings? Or to the policies of dispossession, colonization, erasure and commodification, and criminalization and imprisonment as responses to an increase in poverty? Does it even make sense to dispute the terrain civilizational feminism occupies—also called *mainstream* or white, bourgeois feminism—which envisions correcting injustices by sharing equal positions between women and men (without questioning the organization of society, economics, or culture), and tries to make gender, sex, class, origin, and religion into an entirely private matter—or into a commodity? Fighting femonationalism and femoimperialism (I develop their content below) seems reason enough for defending a decolonial feminism. But that is not enough. The essentialist argument of a female nature that would be better able to respect life and would desire a just and egalitarian society does not hold: women are a political category neither spontaneously nor in themselves. What justifies a reappropriation of the term ‘feminism’ is that its theories and practices are rooted in the awareness of a profound, concrete, daily experience of oppression produced by the state–patriarchy–capital matrix, which manufactures the category of ‘women’ to legitimize policies of reproduction and assignment, both of which are racialized.

Decolonial feminisms do not aim to improve the existing system but to combat all forms of oppression: justice for women means justice for all. It does not hope naïvely, nor does it feed on resentment or bitterness; we know that the road is long and fraught with pitfalls, but we keep in mind the courage and resilience of racialized women throughout history. This is not a new wave of feminism, but the continuation of the struggles for the emancipation of women in the Global South.

Decolonial feminisms draw on the theories and practices that women have forged over time in anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-colonial struggles, helping to expand theories of liberation and emancipation around the world. It is about firmly combatting police violence and the accelerated militarization of society, along with the conception of security that entrusts the army, class/race-based

machine of justice, and the police with the task of ensuring it. It rejects carceral and punitive feminism.

In this cartography of struggle of women in the South, colonial slavery still plays a foundational role in my view. It constitutes the “matrix of race” to use philosopher Elsa Dorlin’s apt phrase.[21] Slavery links the history of wealth accumulation, plantation economics, and rape (the basis of a reproductive policy in the colony) to the history of the systematic destruction of social and family ties, and to the race/class/gender/sexuality knot. The European temporality of slavery/abolition relegates colonial slavery to a historical past and therefore ignores how its strategies of racialization and sexualization continue to cast their shadows on our time. The immense contribution of Afro-feminism (Brazil, United States) to the importance of colonial slavery in the formation of the modern world, in the invention of the white world, and its role in the prohibition of family ties, has still not affected the analyses of white, bourgeois feminism. Feminists in the West have analyzed how ‘good motherhood,’ ‘good mothers,’ and ‘good fathers’ of the heteronormative family have been constructed, but always without taking account of the ‘boomerang effects’ of slavery and colonization. We know that under slavery, children could be taken from their mothers at any time, that mothers were not allowed to defend their children, that Black women were available to the children of their owners as wetnurses and nannies, that Black children were available to the master’s children as companions or playmates, that Black girls and women were sexually exploited, and that all of these roles were subject to the whims of the master, his wife, and his children. Enslaved men were deprived of the social role of father and partner. This legally established destruction of family ties continues to hang over family policies targeting racialized minorities and Indigenous peoples.

White Women and Women of the Global South

White women do not like to be told they are white. To be white is to be constructed as a being so ordinary, so devoid of characteristics, so normal, so meaningless that, as Gloria Wekker points out in *White Innocence*,[22] it is practically impossible to make a white woman recognize that she is white. You tell her, and she’s upset, aggressive, horrified, practically in tears. She finds your

remark 'racist.' For Fatima El-Tayeb, arguing that modern European thought has given birth to race is an intolerable violation of what is dear to Europeans, the idea of a 'colorblind' continent, devoid of the devastating ideology that it has exported throughout the world.[23] The feeling of being innocent is at the heart of this inability to see themselves as white and thus protects them from any responsibility in the current world order. Therefore, there can be no *white* feminism (since there are no white women), only a universal feminism. The ideology of women's rights that civilizational feminism promotes could not be racist, since it comes from a continent free of racism. Before continuing, it should be reiterated—since any reference to the existence of whiteness leads to an accusation of 'reverse racism'—that it is not a question of skin color nor of racializing everything, but of admitting that the long history of racialization in Europe (through anti-Semitism, the invention of the 'Black race' and of the 'Asian race,' or the 'East') has not been without consequences for the conception of human beings, sexuality, natural rights, beauty, and ugliness. Admitting to being white—that is, admitting that privileges have historically been granted to this color—would be a big step. By privileges, I even mean ones as banal as being able to enter a store without being automatically suspected of wanting to steal, or not being systematically told that the apartment you want is already rented, or being naturally taken for the lawyer rather than the assistant, the doctor rather than the nurse, the actress rather than the cleaning lady. There are admittedly white women who have shown, and are showing, deep solidarity with anti-racist political struggles. But white women also need to understand how tiring it is, always having to educate them about their own history. After all, whole libraries on this topic are available to them. What is holding them back? Why are they waiting to be educated? Some say that we are forgetting about class, that racism was invented to divide the working class, that, paradoxically, we bolster the far-right by talking about 'race.' It is always up to racialized people to explain, justify, and accumulate the facts and figures, while neither facts, figures, nor moral sense change anything in the balance of power. Reni Eddo-Lodge expresses a familiar and legitimate feeling when she explains "why I am no longer talking to white people about race." Claiming that the debate on racism can take place as if the two sides were equal is illusory, she writes, and it is not for those who have never been the victims of racism to impose the

framework of the discussion.[24]

The white woman was literally the product of the colony. Philosopher Elsa Dorlin explains how, in the Americas, the first naturalists took sexual difference as their model for the concept of 'race': Amerindians in the Caribbean or imprisoned slaves were taken to be populations with pathogenic, effeminate, or weak temperaments. The definition of a "sexual temperament" moved, Dorlin writes, to that of a "racial temperament." She concludes that the body-politics of the nation was grounded in the opposition between the feminine model of the "mother"—white, healthy, and maternal—and figures of a "degenerate" femininity—the witch, the enslaved African.[25] European women did not escape the epistemological division that took place in the sixteenth century and rendered a significant wealth of knowledge 'non-existent.'[26] In their view, women in the South were deprived of knowledge, a real concept of freedom, of what made up a family or constituted 'a woman' (not necessarily linked to gender or sex defined at birth). Perceiving themselves to be victims of men (and, indeed, they legally remained minors for centuries), European women do not see that their desire for equality with European men was based on the exclusion of racialized people. Nor do they see that the European conception of the world and modernity (of which they are themselves a part) relegated those who belonged neither to their class nor to their race to de facto and de jure inequality. When European women make their experience (often the experience of bourgeois women) universal, they contribute to dividing the world in two: civilized/barbarian, women/men, white/Black, and the binary conception of gender becomes universal. María Lugones has spoken of the "coloniality of gender": the historical experience of colonized women is not only that of racial devaluation,[27] she writes, but also of sexual assignment. Colonized women were reinvented as "women" in light of the norms, criteria, and discriminatory practices used in Medieval Europe.[28] Racialized women have therefore faced a double subjugation: that of colonizers and that of colonized men. The Nigerian feminist philosopher Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí also questions the universality of Euro-modern gender formations. She sees this universality as the manifestation of the hegemony of Western biologism and the domination of Euro-American ideology in feminist theory.[29]

Feminism and Its Repression of Slavery

By drawing an analogy between their situation and that of slaves, European feminists denounced a position of dependence, a status of minors-for-life. But in doing so they erased the central elements of slavery—capture, deportation, sale, trafficking, torture, denial of social and family ties, rape, exhaustion, racism, sexism, and death that framed the lives of female slaves—appropriating through analogy a condition that was not theirs. It is not denying the brutality of masculine domination in Europe to insist on its distinction from colonial slavery. The Enlightenment, the century of the publication of historical feminist texts for the European continent, is also the century when the Transatlantic Slave Trade peaked (70,000 to 90,000 Africans trafficked per year, whereas up until the eighteenth century, the figure was 30,000 to 40,000 per year). The (few) French abolitionist feminists of the eighteenth century used a sentimentalist vision, a literature of pity, to denounce slavery as a crime.[30] One of the most famous works of this genre, Olympe de Gouges' play *Zamore and Mirza*, gives a white woman the main role: it is she who performs the emancipation of Blacks from slavery. Renamed as *Negro Slavery or the Happy Shipwreck*[31] at the request of the Comédie Française in 1785, the play tells the story of a couple of two young maroons on the run taking refuge on a desert island. Zamore, who is a wanted man because he killed a commander who was harassing Mirza, rescues a young French couple from drowning, one of whom, Sophie, is the daughter of the island's governor, Saint-Frémont. Sophie helps Zamore and Mirza escape their enslavement by asking her father for mercy and at the end of the play, the governor frees them. Or, in summary, without the white woman, there would be no freedom. Even this play, timid in tone and content, nevertheless caused a scandal. It was considered subversive because the author suggested "a widespread freedom [that] would make the Negro race as essential as the white race" and that one day "they will cultivate freely their own land like the farmers in Europe and will not leave their fields to go to foreign nations."[32] This account, in which the intervention of whites changes the fate of enslaved Blacks, and in which Blacks must present qualities of gentleness, sacrifice, and submission to deserve freedom, was hegemonic. Only direct testimonies of former captives and slaves contested this narrative of white saviorism. In *Paul and Virginia*, one of

the most widely read books of the eighteenth century, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre softened the nature of white–Black relations. One of the most stunning episodes of the novel features a young, enslaved woman who, having fled because she was mistreated by a slave-master, appears one Sunday morning in front of Virginia's house. The latter takes her in and feeds her before persuading her to return to her master's house and to apologize for running away. The young slave is brought back by sweet Virginia to her master, who, of course, punishes her.

Virginia's absurd naivete is the result of her 'innocent' refusal to acknowledge racism. She transforms slavery into a simple individual relationship where the master's gesture of forgiveness overcomes the violence of the enslaved. The testimonies left by female slaves absolutely contradict this absurdity with their accounts of the brutal consequences that white women refuse to see. In the nineteenth century, most feminists—with a few rare exceptions like Louise Michel and Flora Tristan—supported the colonial empire, which they saw as a lever for releasing colonized women from the shackles of sexism in their societies. They did not reject the civilizing mission; they only wanted to ensure that its feminine side would be respected. They created schools for colonized girls, encouraged service and domestic work, protested against abuse, but never attacked colonization itself. They accepted its structure and institutions, finding in the colony the possibility of deploying the principles and values of their feminism, which adhered to the colonial republican order. Faced with the colonists' hostility, they sublimated their actions. The study of travelers' journals and feminists' reports could make us forget that the military colonial conquest offered the terrain for their travels and their actions, that it is thanks to colonial armies that travel routes opened up, and that places for European women to live were built.

In the hegemonic account of women's rights struggles, one omission in particular highlights the refusal to consider the privileges of whiteness. The hegemonic story features women deprived of their rights who obtain them progressively, leading up to the right to vote, which is the hallmark of European democracies. But, although for a long period of time white women were effectively unable to enjoy many civil rights, they did have the right to own human beings; they owned slaves and plantations and, following the abolition of slavery, headed colonial plantations where forced labor was rampant.[33] They

were not denied access to human property and were granted this right because they were white. One of the greatest enslavers on Réunion Island was a woman, Madame Desbassyns, who had neither the right to vote nor to sit for the baccalaureate,[34] nor to be a lawyer, doctor, or university professor, but she did have the right to own human beings, who were classified as chattel in her estate. As long as the history of women's rights is written without taking this privilege into account, it will be misleading.

Ignoring the role of enslaved women, female maroons, and colonized women workers who were committed to the struggles for freedom and racial equality, white, French feminism does establish the only framework for women's struggles. It aims at equality with bourgeois, white men and is confined to mainland France. Deafness and blindness towards the wellsprings of 'women's rights,' towards the role of colonialism and imperialism in their vision, could only feed an openly nationalist, unequal, and Islamophobic feminist ideology where the term 'French' comes to delineate, not a linguistic field as a common tool, but a national/imperial space.

What were the genders under slavery? Enslaved women were Black and women, but on the plantations all enslaved human beings were beasts of burden. In the eyes of slave owners, Black women were sexual objects and not human beings whose gender would require them to be treated with gentleness and respect. As slaves, their legal status was as objects and therefore they did not fully belong to humanity. In other words, gender does not exist in itself; it is a historical and cultural category, which evolves over time and cannot be conceived in the same way in the metropole and the colony, nor from one colony to another, or even within one colony. For racialized women, affirming what it means *to be a woman* has been a battleground. Women, as I said, are not a political class in itself.

French Exceptionalism: The Republic of Innocence

In France, where republican doctrine is confronted with the unthinkables of the colonial past and the challenges of the post-colonial present, bourgeois feminism (of Left and Right) has come to the rescue by identifying feminism with the Republic. It does not matter that women only obtained the most basic rights very

late in the Republic; the latter is said to be naturally open to differences. The fact that these rights were obtained through costly struggles is erased; in this narrative, they come from above, from the natural generosity of the Republic. It is also forgotten that, while French women obtained the right to vote in 1944, this right was severely restricted in the so-called 'overseas' departments until the 1980s. Not all women living in the French Republic have automatically enjoyed the rights granted to white French women. But it is not only bourgeois women who are racists. In 1976, in the bulletin of a revolutionary group of factory women, women workers in Renault-Flins expressed their anti-Arab racism, adding that it was explained by "the reactionary attitude of Arabs [sic] towards women [and because of] prejudices ingrained in them by the bourgeoisie and which shock their principles: they are the first to be accommodated by the town councils. They do not want to leave their slums, they are dirty, if they returned to their country, there would be less unemployment in France."[35]

Even today, access to prenatal and postnatal care is not equally distributed; racialized women are more easily deprived of access to care, and they are more often victims of medical neglect, if not abuse. The May 2017 death of Naomi Musenga—a 27-year-old woman whose calls to emergency services not only went unanswered but were mocked—highlighted this racist discrimination. No institution appears to be free of structural racism: not schools, not the courts, not prisons, not hospitals, not the army, nor art, culture, or the police. If the debate on structural racism in France is so difficult, it is also because of a passion for abstract principles rather than for studying realities. Despite reports of racist/sexist discrimination even from government agencies, this blindness persists.

Another obstacle to the deracialization of French society is the narcissism maintained through notions of French singularity and exceptionalism. The French language is still presented in the twenty-first century as a vector of the civilizing (feminist) mission because it supposedly carries within it the idea of equality between women and men. It is this reasoning that justifies the priority given to young African women in obtaining government scholarships.[36] However, language is not neutral, and racism has crept into it. The history of words that begin with 'N' in both feminine and masculine, and which are racist insults, is insightful in this regard. By the end of the eighteenth century, the 'N-

word' had fully taken on the meaning of 'Black slave' and the N-word and *Black* were used interchangeably. A legitimate question then arises: by what miracle could feminism's vocabulary have remained untouched by racism? Let us take the example of Hubertine Auclert, one of the great figures of nineteenth-century French republican feminism, known for her tireless struggle for women's suffrage, against the Napoleonic code which had made women legal minors and subjects to their husbands, and against the death penalty. Secretary of the newspaper *L'avenir des femmes* (*Women's Future*), she adopted Victor Hugo's formula, 'women: those I call slaves,'[37] studied the role of women in revolutions, and denounced "the slavery of women."[38] Laurence Klejman and Florence Rochefort, authors of a 1989 book on French feminism, summarize her struggle as follows:

> She drew all her political training from feminism and, impatient, she revolted against her elders who were content either with a principled demand or who simply refused to take women's suffrage seriously because of the danger that this reform would represent for the regime. She chose provocation as her tactic. Astute and imaginative, she immediately asserted a political identity through various acts of civil disobedience: voter registration, tax strikes, refusing the census on the grounds that if French women do not vote, they should not pay tax or be counted either.[39]

In 1881, she founded her own newspaper, *La Citoyenne* (*The Female Citizen*), in which she demonstrated that the principles of the Republic were being flouted, argued that Bastille Day was a celebration of masculinity, and considered the Napoleonic code as a remnant of the monarchy. For Auclert, a dividing line existed: *the color line*. In her text "Women are the Negroes [sic]," she protested against the fact that the right to vote was granted to Black men in the colonies after the abolition of slavery in 1848: "The step given to savage negroes, over the cultured white women of the metropole, is an insult to the white race." The right to vote was colored by the feminist pen: "If negroes vote, why don't white women?" "In our distant possessions," she continued, "Black men, who are not interested in our ideas or our affairs, vote. However, we deny the vote to enlightened women in the metropole, when it would prevent them

from being crushed by the burden of social constraints.” The *coloring* of suffrage reveals the force of racist prejudice for this feminist: “This comparison between half-savage ‘negroes,’ who have neither responsibilities nor obligations, voting, and civilized women, taxpayers and non-voters, more than abundantly demonstrates that men retain their omnipotence over women only in order to exploit their disadvantage.” It is therefore necessary “to prevent Frenchmen from treating French women as ‘negroes’.”[40] Opposing enlightenment to obscurantism replays the old opposition between civilization and barbarism, but it is above all, accepting the racialization of feminism. The universal is very difficult to hold on to.

Women in French Colonialism

Frantz Fanon describes the role that twentieth-century colonialism gave to colonized women thus: “At an initial stage, there was a pure and simple adoption of the well-known formula, ‘Let’s win over the women and the rest will follow.’” He continues,

> This enabled the colonial administration to define a precise political doctrine: ‘if we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where the men keep them out of sight. It is the situation of woman that was accordingly taken as the theme of action. The dominant administration solemnly undertook to defend this woman, pictured as humiliated, sequestered, cloistered. It described the immense possibilities of woman, unfortunately transformed by the Algerian man into an inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized object. The behavior of the Algerian was very firmly denounced and described as medieval and barbaric. With infinite science, a blanket indictment against the ‘sadistic and vampirish’ Algerian attitude toward women was prepared and drawn up. Around the family life of the Algerian, the occupier piled up a whole mass of judgments, appraisals, reasons, accumulated anecdotes, and edifying examples, thus attempting to confine the Algerian within a circle of guilt.[41]

This ideology feeds twenty-first-century civilizational feminism: negrophobic and orientalist representations, preconceived ideas about *the* oriental or African family, and about the mother and father in these families. Social reality has no place in this ideology because it would then become necessary to analyze the human and economic catastrophe that French republican colonial policies have caused in the colonies.[42] The terrain on which civilizational feminism has developed and garnered the attention of the powerful is multiple: the French Army's attempts to unveil Algerian women; the representation of Algerian women combatants as victims (either of the Army or their fellow male fighters, but never as beings making a free choice); the indifference to the way that republican coloniality oppresses women of the overseas territories and racialized women in France; the refusal to denounce capitalism; the faith in European modernity.

The fear inspired by women's participation in national liberation movements has led to a mobilization of international institutions, foundations, and ideologues which shape discourses and develop practices, including those based on repression. This is precisely how the notions of development and 'women's empowerment' were spread, just as the discourse of 'women's rights' had been. The latter, which emerged as a feminist technique of discipline in the late 1980s—at the same time as the discourses of the 'end of history' and the 'end of ideologies'—would be propelled by multiple developments throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Developmentalist Feminism

Since the 1970s, international institutions and North American foundations have been active in channeling and steering feminist movements. The 1970s was a decade that saw the entrance of millions of women into the realm of paid work. The transformations of capitalism were decisive moments in bringing about an explosion of low wages and precarity, notably through the worldwide so-called feminization of under-skilled jobs in open economic zones and in the informal economy. During this decade, the progressive feminization of employment went hand in hand with a very clear increase in global inequalities. The conflict between a revolutionary approach to women's liberation and an anti-

discrimination approach, which seeks reform within the law and women's integration into capitalism, has thus intensified. The revolutionary approach does not reject the struggle for reforms but it does reject the argument that renders women's entry into the realm of paid work as an opportunity to gain individual autonomy; the revolutionary approach proposes collective organization in the workplace instead. In the anti-discrimination approach, independence is measured by the capacity to access consumption and individual autonomy (recall the image of the 'corporate woman' and the accompanying trend of blazers with shoulder pads). Lastly, the 1970s was also the decade of the global deployment of anti-natal policies that targeted Third World women. The United States led this effort through financial support of birth control in racialized communities domestically and in South America. In a document that had long been confidential, the National Security Administration clearly exposed the reasons for this policy—too many youths would want to emigrate, thus threatening the security of the free world—and recommended that the federal agency be entrusted with it.[43] In France, sterilization and abortions in the 'overseas' departments were encouraged by the government.[44]

It was not, however, the United States, its government, or its mainstream feminist movement that sought to raise the issue of women's rights at the international level, but rather the Soviet Union and Third World countries. In the early 1970s, they proposed that the United Nations organize a "Decade for Women." Programmed to start in 1975, its aim would be to "ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality," to affirm that "women's rights are an integral part of human rights," and to "promote gender equality and end violence against women."[45] But these rather modest objectives would be soon discarded in favor of promoting women's entry into the neoliberal order. Indeed, though the US government was initially suspicious of the initiative—as ever, birth control remained the primary basis of their interest in the Third World—by 1979, President Carter announced that for the American government "the key objective of U.S. foreign policy is to advance worldwide the status and conditions of women."[46] In France, the creation of a State Secretariat for Women's Rights in 1974 indicated the institutionalization of feminism. Women's rights were gradually stripped of their political significance.

Yet, things did not go exactly as planned at the four major meetings of the Decade for Women—Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995).[47] The movement to collect information about women around the world largely supported by governments announced the focus on accumulating data and reports and on consolidating the existence of expertise on women's rights. In Copenhagen, feminists from North African and Sub-Saharan countries challenged the terms 'savage customs' and 'backwards cultures' used by Western feminists denouncing female mutilations, genital infibulation, or what they saw as other violations of human rights, and analyzed this insistence as a desire to westernize women's struggles. In Nairobi, the opposition to the occupation of Palestine revealed the opposition between a decolonial feminism and a feminism that did not want to confront coloniality. Ultimately, the question of discrimination rather than of liberation took center stage. In Beijing, the return to order was made clear. Unlike the location of the official meeting in the city center, made fit for an assembly of dignitaries, the alternative forum where thousands of feminist NGOs and activists gathered was outside the city and lacking sufficient facilities.

Government negotiations were held behind closed doors.[48] While the situation of women around the world was worsening because of imperialism and capitalism, the civilizing feminist machine was being built. In her closing speech at the Beijing meeting, Hillary Clinton declared that women's rights were human rights, envisioned through a completely Western frame. Anti-colonial movements for national independence, which had emphasized the end of the exploitation of the Global South's resources, denounced a Western-dominated organization of information, and defended their own concept of health, education, and women's rights, were marginalized in favor of a discourse that refuses to question the structures of capitalism and makes women into a homogeneous social subject. Throughout all these decades, in Third World countries, women had fought to give decolonial content to women's rights, while simultaneously being subjected to the full force of structural adjustment policies. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank appropriated the ideology of women's rights as individual rights, and, at the end of the 1970s, the slogan 'women's empowerment' was adopted by the political world, from both the left and the right, from NGOs to feminists of the Global North. For the World Bank,

women's empowerment was dependent on policies of both development and of birth rate reduction.[49] For NATO countries, women's rights were integrated into what they claimed were their national values and interest.[50]

The civilizational feminism of the 1980s inherited these ideological frameworks and helped to cement them in place, giving them content. Structural adjustment programs promising development and autonomy took on a female face. Very quickly then, this ploy was mobilized in the service of imperialist campaigns.

While feminism as civilizing mission is not new—it served colonization—by that time, it benefited from exceptional means of dissemination: international assemblies, support from Western and postcolonial states, women's media, economic journals, government and international institutions, grants and support from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, foundations, and NGOs. International aid and development institutions made women the pillar of development in the Global South claiming that they were better than men at managing the money they received,[51] that they knew how to save money, and that they complied better with the regulations of the granting programs. In summary, women are good customers, so they will change the world. Women in the Global South have become the custodians of hundreds of development projects—workshops or cooperatives, where the production of local products, like weaving, crafts, and sewing, are valued. Women in the Global North are encouraged to support their 'sisters' of the South by buying their products or by opening up boutiques to sell them, by getting involved in funding and organizing programs to increase their autonomy, their *empowerment* or to teach them management. There are certainly some women in the Global South who have without doubt benefited from these projects, been able to send their kids to school, or risen out of poverty, but these projects can also fail while reinforcing the narcissism of white women who are so happy to 'help' as long as it does not upset their own lives. For the feminist Jules Falquet, 'women's *empowerment*' was set up to respond to the feminization of poverty, in other words, to prop up and perfect policies of pacification and control.[52]

I would like to give an example of the grip of NGO vocabulary in women's groups of the Global South. In March 2018, I was at a meeting in the Northeast of India, attended by about a hundred women from the tribes of Nagaland, a

region occupied by the Indian Army. These women experience violence from the army and traffickers, systemic rape, and a high rate of alcoholism and suicide of young men in their communities; they hold their communities on their shoulders. When they presented their actions, they systematically used the language of NGOs: empowerment, capacity building, leadership, governance. They had, one could say, lost their own voices and become custodians of NGO language. I found a way to suggest a critique of this ‘language,’ inspired by the feminist critique of the ideology of care. I pointed out to them that somehow Western NGOs were condemning them to constant cleansing and to constant repairing of the shattered lives of their communities, while being careful about holding the real perpetrators accountable. Why didn’t we spend a little time understanding how their communities had been broken and who had done the breaking? Who was responsible for the hopelessness of the youth? Who was responsible for the rapes and arbitrary arrests? Of course, the women knew the answers to all of these questions, but at first their analyses had been overshadowed by the depoliticizing discourse of NGOs. The latter certainly did face government censorship, but their apolitical discourse was perpetuating the women’s oppression. By adopting a gender theory that masks relations of power and political choices, NGOs accepted the narrow path that the Indian government was imposing in the region. My goal here is not to make an easy critique of NGOs, but to study not only how they depoliticize but also how they contribute to new oppressions. The range of pacification techniques is very wide and we must include the ‘Girl Power’ (women forever remain *girls*) trope of television shows and films. Many of these series, films, and articles are not all bad (I may enjoy some of them), and I do not deny that they can represent important counter-models for little girls, young women, and women, but the massive diffusion of individual stories perpetuates the idea that anyone can fulfill her dream if she is not afraid of challenging certain norms, but never politically. These stories are often based on a psychologization of discrimination. The struggle is rarely collective; the structural cruelty and brutality of power are rarely shown in an explicit way. Heroines are dealing with individuals whose power exceeds their own, but narratives barely touch on what makes up this structure, and how it is based in deep-seated mechanisms of domination and exploitation that have the police, army, court, and state at their disposal. They

never show the amount of courage, daily effort, and collective organization needed to change these structures.The decades of the 1970s–1990s saw the development of a proactive strategy intended to counter and weaken decolonial feminisms. Feminism would become reasonable, no longer equated with the ‘*pétroleuses*,’[53] ‘hysterics,’ ‘manhaters,’ ‘dykes,’ or ‘the unfucked and the unfuckable’[54] of the 1970s. The foothold of ‘true’ feminism and women’s rights in Europe was constantly reaffirmed, and the hostility towards Muslims and migrants has offered this feminism the opportunity to demonstrate its adherence to European values.

3. In *L'idéologie raciste* (1972), sociologist Colette Guillaumin proposed the notion of *racisation* to describe the processes by which power assigns non-white individuals to subaltern positions and justifies racial discriminations. "No, race does not exist. Yes, the race does exist. No, of course, she is not what they say she is, but she is nonetheless the most tangible, real, brutal, of realities," Guillaumin wrote in, *Sexe, race et pratique du pouvoir: L'idée de nature,* Paris: iXe, 2016, p. 140. *Racisé·e·s*, *racialisé·e·s* ("racialized") was adopted by anti-racist movements in the early 2000s to speak of Black, Maghrebin, Asian, Muslim, and Indigenous women and men to denounce systemic, structural racism.
4. The SNCF is France's state-owned national railway company. The Gare du Nord is one of six major SNCF stations in Paris and the busiest railway station in Europe. —Trans.
5. The original statement, "We defend the right to hit on people as fundamental to sexual liberation" can be accessed here: www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2018/01/09/nous-defendons-uneliberte-d-importuner-indispensable-a-la-liberte-sexuelle_5239134_3232.html (accessed January 2, 2021). A partial English translation of the statement ran here: www.deadline.com/2018/01/catherine-deneuve-defends-men-sexual-harassment-1202239110/ (accessed January 2, 2021). —Trans.
6. Literally meaning "denounce your pig," the hashtag is roughly the French version of #MeToo, though the latter is also used in France. It was started in October 2017 by Sandra Muller, a French journalist who lives in New York. —Trans.

Chapter 1 Taking Sides: Decolonial Feminism

1. I summarize below Sara Farris' analysis of these points of convergence in Sara Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
2. Angela Y. Davis and Cornel West, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*, ed. Frank Barat. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016, p. 137.
3. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage, 1966, p. 12.
4. The University of Feminism was organized by Marlène Schiappa, the French State's Secretary of Equality between Women and Men from 2017 to 2020 in the first government of Emmanuel Macron. The event took place in Paris on September 13-14, 2018. Schiappa said of the University:

   > Our desire was to highlight the plurality of feminist movements because the movement has never been monolithic; it has always been crossed by different currents. We wanted to have a place of debate anchored in three watchwords: reflections, opinions, and actions. It is a central concern of President Emmanuel Macron's five-year term to make sure these debates permeate society.

5. Réunion Island is one of five departments of the French State outside of Europe; it became a department in 1946 after hundreds of years of French colonial occupation. Réunion Island is located in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and Mauritius. —Trans.
6. As Vergès gives context to this Ordinance elsewhere:

   > The decree was originally a clause of a February 4, 1960 law enacted by [Michel] Debré's government to deal with opposition to the Algerian War. The decree authorized the French government to take 'all necessary measures to maintain order, safeguard the State and the Constitution, and pursue the pacification and administration of Algeria.' It was a decree enacted against French civil servants living in Algeria who supported the Algerian nationalist struggle.

Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Metissage*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1999, p. 116n76. —Trans.

7. Prosper Ève, *Île à peur. La peur redoutée ou récupérée à la Réunion des origines à nos jours*. Saint-André, Réunion: Océan Éditions, 1992.
8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, reprint edition. New York: Grove Press, 2005, p. 58. Translation modified.
9. France is administratively divided into various departments (currently, 96 in Europe and five overseas). In 1947, the French Constitution redefined five of its previous colonies into departments of France, with the same legal status as any of the other regions of France. This included French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, and Mayotte. Collectively, they are referred to as the *département et régions d'outre-mer* or abbreviated as *DROM*. —Trans.
10. In what follows, I use either "a movement" or "movements" in order to avoid saying "the movement." I do so in order to signal a plurality of feminisms, the possibility of alternative forms of these feminist alternatives. But all of these are resolutely anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist, which is what interests me here.
11. In France, the term "Negrophobia" to describe anti-Black racism emerged with the creation in 2010 of the Anti-Negrophobia Brigade, which denounces state racism and advocates political anti-racism. See www.facebook.com/BrigadeAntiNegrophobiePageOfficielle/ (accessed July 2018).
12. Cited in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialisation and Decolonization*. London: Routledge, 2018, p. 64. The cited piece can be found here: Peter P. Ekeh, *Colonialism and Social Structure*. Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan, 1983.
13. *Marronnage*: running away from the plantation for a day, a month, or years. Maroons carved territories of freedom in the lands of unfreedom in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and American colonies. They fought against the militia and armies sent by colonial powers, forcing them in some cases to sign treaties recognizing their sovereignty (the names *quilombos* in Brazil or *palenques* in South America resonate to this day). They preserved rituals, language, and cultures. Their names and practices of resistance, which are in popular memories synonyms of struggles against racism and colonialism, are being reappropriated to design current strategies of resistance.
14. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973, p. 35.
15. This quote is taken from Lilla Watson's speech at the 1985 United Nations' World Conference on Women in Nairobi that culminated in the United Nations Decade for Women. But Watson prefers to say that the sentence is the result of a collective reflection of Aboriginal activist groups in Queensland in the 1970s.
16. Darren Lenard Hutchinson, "Identity Crisis: 'Intersectionality,' 'Multidimensionality,' and the Development of an Adequate Theory of Subordination," *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 2001, vol. 6, pp. 285–317, p. 309.
17. Félix Boggio Éwanjé-Épée, Stella Magliani-Belkacem, Morgane Merteuil, and Fréderic Monferrand, "Programme pour un féminisme de la totalité" in Tithi Bhattacharya et al., *Pour un féminisme de la totalité,* Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2017, pp. 13–31, p. 18.
18. Ibid, p. 23.
19. Françoise Vergès, *The Wombs of Women: Race, Capital, Feminism*, trans. Kaiama L. Glover. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
20. The presentation was made in countries of the Global South during conferences and workshops about decolonial pedagogies. An article developed from this presentation: Françoise Vergès, "Bananes, esclavage et capitalisme racial," *Le Journal des Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, Cahiers C*, 19, 2018–2019, pp. 9–11.
21. Elsa Dorlin, *La matrice de la race: généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la nation française*. Paris: La

Découverte, 2006.

22. Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.
23. Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, p. xv.
24. Reni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, London: Bloomsbury, 2017.
25. Elsa Dorlin, *La matrice de la race: généalogie sexuelle et coloniale de la nation française*. Paris: La Découverte, 2006.
26. For more on this, see Boaventura de Souza Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge, 2014.
27. The term Vergès uses here—'minoration'—has both the sense of devaluation and the sense of placing someone in the (legally and culturally) inferior or dependent position of children. —Trans.
28. María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," *Hypatia*, 2007, vol. 22, no.1, pp. 186–219; Lugones, "Colonialidad y género," *Tabula Rasa*, no. 9, 2008, pp. 73–101. In French, this theory is taken up in Jules Falquet's introduction to the text "Les racines féministes et lesbiennes autonomes de la proposition décoloniale d'Abya Yala," *Contretemps*, April 2017, in two parts.
29. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
30. For more on the politics of pity and French abolitionism, see Françoise Vergès, *Abolir l'esclavage, une utopie coloniale. Les ambiguïtés d'une politique humanitaire.* Paris: Albin Michel, 2001.
31. Most contemporary English-language translations title the play *Black Slavery*, but de Gouges' French term 'nègres' more accurately corresponds to the English 'negro' or 'nigger,' depending on context —Trans.
32. On the critics of Olympe de Gouges' play, see Tomasz Wysłobocki, "Olympe de Gouges à la Comédie-Française: un naufrage dramatique," *Fabula / Les colloques*, Théâtre et scandale (I), URL: http://www.fabula.org/colloques/document5884.php (accessed December 29, 2020); Blanc, Olivier, "Une humaniste au XVIIIe siècle: Olympe de Gouges," ed. Évelyne Morin-Rotureau, *Combats de femmes 1789–1799. La Révolution exclut les citoyennes*. Paris: Autrement, 2003, pp. 15–33; René Tarin. "*L'Esclavage des noirs*, ou la mauvaise conscience d'Olympe de Gouges," *Dix-huitième Siècle, La recherche aujourd'hui, sous la direction de Michel Delon*, 1998, no. 30, pp. 373–81 (all accessed July 2018).
33. The film *Indochine* (Régis Wargnier, 1992) is a good example of this filmwashing. It is about a white French woman, Éliane Devire, who in the 1930s directs a rubber tree plantation with her father Émile. Described as being fair to her workers (though most rubber plantation used forced labor), she adopts Camille, an orphan princess from Annam (the French protectorate in Central Vietnam). They both fall in love with a young officer in the French navy, and what follows is more of the same: colonial nostalgia accompanied by a watered-down version of the anti-colonial struggle.
34. The baccalaureate is a set of exams that French students take at the end of secondary school; passing is necessary in order to work in certain professions, to enter university, or to be eligible for certain forms of further professional training. —Trans.
35. Fanny Gallot, "Le 'travail femme' quotidien de 'Revo,' puis de l'OCT dans les entreprises (1973–1979)" in *"Prolétaires de tous les pays, qui lave vos chaussettes?" Le genre de l'engagement dans les années 1968*, eds. Ludivine Bantigny, Fanny Bugnon, and Fanny Gallot. Rennes: PUR, 2017, pp. 109–22, p. 119.
36. The current French government promises African women access to modernity thanks to their adoption of the French language, all while resorting to colonial arguments about African women's

birth rate, casting them as responsible for poverty on the continent. Emmanuel Macron said of African women on July 8, 2017: "When today, countries are still having 7–8 children per woman, you can decide to spend billions of Euros, but you will still not stabilize anything."

37. Auclert transformed the original quote which read "this slave according to reality is the woman" (*cette esclave selon la réalité, c'est la femme*). Letter of Victor Hugo to Léon Richter (director, with the feminist Maria Deraismes, of the journal *L'Avenir des femmes*), *Écrits politiques, Anthologie établie et annotée par Franck Laurent*. Paris: Le livre de poche, 2001, cited in https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/morgane-ortin/lettre-de-victor-hugo-a-leon-richer_b_9391064.html (accessed December 26, 2020).
38. Conference by Edith Taïeb, "Hubertine Auclert: 'de la République dans le ménage' à la 'vraie République'," Abbaye St Vincent, Le Mans, November 3, 2003, https://www.pedagogie.ac-nantes.fr/histoire-geographie-citoyennete/ressources/hubertine-auclertde-la-republique-dans-le-menage-a-la-vraie-republique-599669.kjsp (accessed October 14, 2018). In her work, *Arab Women in Algeria* (trans. Jacqueline Grenez. Brovender: De Gruyter, 2014), Auclert advocates for colonial assimilation over a colonialism of contempt and the cruelty of civil servants. She wrote that 'Arabs' wanted assimilation and that the dream of Muslim women was to be like French women. This orientalist text brings together the elements of colonial civilizational feminism: some ethnography and tourist sociology, clichés about the 'resigned' character of the Arabs, polygamy, and 'Arab marriage' that is really 'child rape.' For Auclert, French women who were, because of their condition, close to Arabs were best positioned to study them.
39. Klejman and Rochefort's presentation does not address feminists' attitudes towards racism and colonialism, continuing the dominant tradition in French research of ignoring the role of the colony in the field of politics. Laurence Klejman and Florence Rochefort, "Le féminisme, une utopie républicane 1860–1914," presented at the conference "Femmes et pouvoirs, XIXe-XXe siècle" in 2018. www.senat.fr/colloque_femmes_pouvoir (accessed July 2018).
40. Hubertine Auclert, "Les femmes sont les n…," in *Le Vote des femmes*. Paris: V. Giard & E. Brière, 1908, pp. 196–8.
41. Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," in *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*, ed. Prasenjit Duara. London and New York: Routledge, 2003, pp. 42–55, p. 44.
42. In 1945, Aimé Césaire painted a very negative picture of the centuries of French colonization at the Constituent Assembly: no schools, high mortality rate, the economy in the hands of a few, etc. In 1954, in Algeria, 10% of the population (of which a large majority were settlers) held 90% of the country's wealth. For 200,000 European children, there were 11,400 schools, while 1,250,000 Arab and Berber children shared 699 institutions. On the eve of independence in the 1950s, only 4% of school-age girls went to school (10% of all Algerian children and 97% of European children), even though a "schooling plan" had been passed by decree on November 27, 1944. The few training centers that did open, in particularly during the Centenary of 1930, confined young women and girls to learning household tasks (cooking, ironing) or crafts (carpet weaving, embroidery, etc.) and in any case, their enrollment numbers were so low as to be purely symbolic. See: Feriel Lalami, "L'enjeu du statut des femmes durant la période coloniale en Algérie," *Nouvelles Questions féministes*, 2008/3, vol. 27, pp. 16–27. DOI: 10.3917/nqf.273.0016. URL: www.cairn.info/revue-nouvelles-questions-feministes-2008–3-page-16.htm (accessed July 2018).
43. National Security Memorandum, *Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests*, December 10, 1974, declassified in March 1989.
44. See Françoise Vergès, *The Wombs of Women: Race, Capital, Feminism*, trans. Kaiama L. Glover. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.
45. www.un.org/fr/sections/issues-depth/women (accessed July 2018).

46. “World Wide Status and Rights of Women: Telegram of the Department of State to All Diplomatic and Consular Posts,” May 31, 1979. www.history.state.gov/historicaldocumentsfrus1977–80v02/d327 (accessed July 2018). On the impact of the international politics of the 1970s on feminism see Karen Garner, “Global Gender Policies in the Nineties,” *Journal of Women’s History*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2012; Susan Watkins, “Which Feminisms”, *New Left Review*, Jan–Feb 2018, no. 109, pp. 5–72.
47. Jules Falquet’s work on the Decade for Women, the international politics of gender and its consequences on the politics of development for women in the Global South is clarifying. See: “Penser la mondialisation dans une perspective féministe,” in *Travail*, *Genre, Société*, 2011, vol. 1, pp. 81–98; “L’ONU, alliée des femmes? Une analyse féministe du système des organisations internationales,”, *Multitudes*, January 11, 2003, pp. 171–91.
48. See Jules Falquet, *Multitudes*, Ibid.; Greta Hoffman Nemiroff, “Maintenant que les clameurs se sont tues, le jeu en valait-il la chandelle?” in *Recherches Féministes*, 1995, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 159–70.
49. Among the many works dedicated to the reorganization of racialized women’s work in the 1970s and since, see Ester Boserup, *Women’s Role in Economic Development*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970; Jules Falquet, *Pax Neoliberalia. Perspectives féministes sur la (reorganization de) la violence*. Donnemarie-Dontilly: Éditions iXe, 2016; Laurent Fraisse, Isabelle Guérin, and Madeleine Hersent, *Femmes, économie et development. De la résistance à la justice sociale*. Paris: IRD/Éditions Ères, 2011; Rhacel Salazar Parrenas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001; Pun Ngia, *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workforce*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005; “Gender Alternatives in African Development: Theories, Methods, and Evidence,” *Codesria*, 2005, www.codesria.org/spip/php?article362&lang=en (accessed July 2018). For a defense of a civilizing feminist point of view, see Melinda Gates, *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*. New York: Flatiron Books, 2019.
50. See NATO/EAPC (Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council) Women, Peace, and Security Policy and Action Plan 2018: www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2018_09/20180920_180920-WPS-Action-Plan-2018.pdf (accessed July 2018).

    In a 2017 report, NATO wrote: “on the military side, an advisor for questions of gender for the International Military Staff and an expert advisory committee (NATO Committee on Gender) responsible for promoting the integration of the gender dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of military policies, programs, and operations,” “l’OTAN doit devenir un protecteur majeur des droits des femmes,” *Geneva Tribune*, December 12, 2017.
51. International institutions have adopted policies that insist on gender equality. In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank and IMF widely deployed the argument that women were more responsible, to prop up their policies with regard to development and micro-credit, thereby moving attention away from their policies that had put women and men on unemployment, broken community ties, strengthened systemic violence and individualism, and placed the burden of caring for society on women. Ana Revenga and Sudhir Shetty’s article “Empowering Women Is Smart Economics” is very clear on this subject, demonstrating all of the benefits the entry of women into business and work brings to the capitalist economy (in *Finance and Development*, March 2012), www.imf.org/externa/publs/ft/fandd/2012/03/revenga.htm (accessed July 2018). In 2014, the IMF Report *Gender at Work: A Companion to the World Development Report on Jobs* described the obstacles to women’s entry into the job market and the salary discrimination they face, emphasizing gender inequality. In 2018, Kristalina Georgieva, Chief Executive of the World Bank declared that “No economy can attain its full economic potential without the full and complete participation of men and women” and that the Francophone Institute for Sustainable Development, a subsidiary wing of

the IFO, highlighted the essential role of women in development. www.mediaterre.org/actu,20180306233944,13.html (accessed July 2018).

52. Jules Falquet, “Genre et développement: une analyse des institutions internationales depuis la Conférence de Pékin,” in Fenneke Reysoo and Christine Verschuur, *On m’appelle à régner. Mondialisation, pouvoirs et rapports de genre*. Geneva: IUE, 2003, pp. 59–90.
53. ‘*Pétroleuses*’ were women supporters of the Paris Commune, who were accused of having burned down much of the city in 1871. The frenzied rumors that working-class women were to blame was an effect of compounded classism, sexism, and red-baiting, rather than the reporting of a true, widespread phenomena. In the 1970s, the term *pétroleuse* was reclaimed by groups of the anti-capitalist French feminist movement to signify women openly engaged in militant, revolutionary struggle. —Trans.
54. This translation of ‘*mal baisées*’ is borrowed from Frank Wynne’s translation of ‘*les mal baisées et les imbaisables*’ in Virginie Despentes, *King Kong Theory*. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020. With thanks to Charlotte Coombe for the reference.—FV.

2. The Evolution towards Twenty-First Century Civilizational Feminism

1. The organization, whose full name *Choisir la cause des femmes* means ‘Choose the Cause of Women,’ was founded by Gisèle Halimi and Simone de Beauvoir in 1971 and initially focused on the decriminalization of abortion and the criminalization of rape. Halimi remained its president until her death in July 2020. —Trans.
2. The Club des Égaux, or Club of Equals, was a think tank founded by the journalist Patrick Kessel that focused on a defense of a French secularism and “republican values.” —Trans.
3. “France Plus” (1985–1997) was a movement founded by academic Arezki Dahmani, which sought to facilitate the assimilation of young people of North African descent through secularism, seeing racism as a moral flaw. —Trans.
4. La Maison de la Mutualité, the headquarters of the federation of nonprofit mutual insurers in Paris, was, until the late 1980s, a historic center for militant leftist political meetings, demonstrations, events, conferences, and other activities. In the 1970s, many feminist meetings were held there. —Trans.
5. Élisabeth Badinter, Régis Debray, Alain Finkielkraut, Élisabeth de Fontenay, and Catherine Kintzler, “Foulard islamique: Profs, ne capitulons pas!” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, November 2, 1989, reprinted by the Comité Laïcité République: www.laicite-republique.org/foulard-islamique-profs-ne-capitulons-pas-le-nouvel-observateur-2-nov-89.html (accessed July 2018). The letter begins with these words: “Only the future will tell whether the year of the Bicentennial has seen the Munich of the republican school. It is good, you say, to appease the spirits without playing into the hands of the fanatics. You would have preserved peace in both schools and society, with some concessions.” (The letter’s reference to Munich has become a code to refer to the 1938 settlement that permitted the German annexation of the Sudetenland and has stood since as a proof of the renouncement by democracies against rising fascism, and its goal of appeasement. In other words, accepting the veil was opening the door to similar betrayals. —Trans.)
6. Archives of the Marguerite Durand Library, consulted in March 2018.
7. Originally founded by Simone de Beauvoir as the League of Women’s Rights.
8. “Lettre aux Verts”, October 30, 1989, Archives of Anne Zelinski, Marguerite Durand Library, consulted in March 2018.