

Being and becoming: Butler reads de Beauvoir*

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Abstract

My starting point in this article is to examine how a *quasi-homophony* with the consecrated statement by Simone de Beauvoir (*on ne n'aît pas femme, on devient*) helps consider the radicality of her thought, which Judith Butler affirmed the French philosopher was not able to anticipate. This radicality as the power of Beauvoir's thought is what animates the path taken by the text, whose ultimate goal is to dismantle the fallacy of the so-called "gender ideology" and to accentuate the strength of Beauvoir's philosophy in the contemporary political context.

Keywords: Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Feminist Theory, Existentialism, Freedom.

* Received 20 August 2019, accepted 31 October 2019. Translated by Jeffrey Hoff.

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“Beauvoir’s theory implied seemingly radical consequences,
ones that she herself did not entertain”
(Judith Butler)

Introduction

I begin by turning to a near homophony between two phrases in Simone de Beauvoir’s original text: “*on ne naît pas femme, on devient*” and “*on n’est pas femme, on devient*”. Unfortunately, in English, they lose the sonorous resource when translated: “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” and “one is not, but becomes woman”. In compensation, it is possible to substitute the verb become, which has already been recognized, by the French verb *devenir*¹, approximating my vocabulary with the argument that I want to develop: in Simone de Beauvoir, woman is already shifted from being to *devenir*, a consequence of the openings created by existential French thought of which she is an exponent. It can be said, for example, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman” is a feminist translation of the hypothesis “existence precedes essence”, which synthesizes French existentialism of the 1940s ’50s. This movement of *devenir*-woman supposes deontologizing existence (*on ne naît/on n’est pas femme*) to cast it into an experience of “situated freedom”, a theme so dear to the work of Beauvoir.

In my perspective, the passage from being to *devenir* that takes place in Beauvoir is radicalized in Butler, in such a way that if the phrase would be re-written by her, it would be “*On naît/n’est pas, on devient en différence*”, or “One is not born/one is not, one becomes/*devém* in differentiation”. The possibility to remove the word woman would be the radicality already present in Beauvoir’s thought, but which she did not perceive, as I refer to in the epigraph and repeat here with the quote: “Beauvoir’s theory implied seemingly radical consequences, ones that she herself did not entertain”

¹ In some cases, I considered it necessary to keep the original verb, *devenir*, also used in the article in Portuguese, to reinforce the idea of movement, a continuous process that not always the translation by become allows.

(Butler, 1990:176). The addition of the notion of *différance* is a proposal I make to accentuate the permanent movement that is found in the use of the verb *devenir*, but which is radicalized here.

I even risk affirming that some of the problems created in *Gender Trouble* would not have been possible without the openings created by Beauvoir's philosophy, although not only hers. Firstly, Butler uses Beauvoir to radicalize the deontologicalization of the subject that had already been announced in the French philosopher. It is what allows me to say that, in Butler's philosophy, the *devenir*-woman is insufficient, because it becomes necessary to question what essence or substance could offer the guarantee that a body born female becomes a woman. A body is not born, becomes a body; a body is not, becomes a body, and this *devenir* takes place through all the markers that are inscribed in it and cast into temporality. To propose the shift from being to *devenir* in Beauvoir and Butler, this article will briefly review the problem of the subject in the two authors, both of whom were readers of French Hegelianism of the twentieth century, to then discuss Butler's use of the concept of gender and the problem of its attribution to the philosophy of Beauvoir. Finally, I intend to reach the proposal that gender is one of the corporal markers that introduce the theme of intersectionality in Butler's work, and in this way, *simultaneously expands and reduces the concept of gender*, to make it simply one more marker that separates lives that are livable from lives that are killable. This change complexifies the demands of the feminist movement, while simultaneously expanding them.

1. Subject

Until 1931 when Alexandre Koyré published *Hegel em Iena na Revue d'histoire de la philosophie*, studies about Hegel in French philosophy were practically inexistent, except for the publication, which had gone nearly unnoticed, of *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, by Jean Wahl. In the 1940s, the courses of Alexandre Kojève and, then those of his

student Jean Hyppolite, were the important marks in the French reading of Hegel, with the publication of Hyppolite's *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, by the first, and of *Genèse et Structure de la Phénoménologie de l'Esprit de Hegel* by the second. Hyppolite was the supervisor of Derrida's doctoral thesis about the phenomenology of Husserl, which explains my initial reference to the term *différance*.

Beauvoir's philosophy developed in this environment, in dialog with both existentialism and the thinkers critical of the philosophies of the subject. From the very Introduction of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir is concerned with the attribution of woman as a figure of alterity, as the Other of man: "She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of his essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (Beauvoir, 2009:17). In this point, the author refers to a passage in which the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas (1947) is proposing to think of sexual difference as a duality of two complementary terms. Beauvoir identifies an androcentric vision here, and a male privilege to determine the woman as Other, thus maintaining the female in a secondary position. Tatsuro Ushida (2001), who commented on the work of Lévinas, argues that the *The Second Sex* had been written largely to refute Lévinas' ideas about the female, which was understood by this philosopher from the Jewish tradition as a complement to the male and therefore, necessarily different. Ushida also affirms that Lévinas' proposals about the female as reception or shelter, developed in his main work (Lévinas, 1961), were a response not only to Beauvoir's criticisms, but above all to the position in relation to the demand for equality between men and women. For Lévinas, to think of difference, was at that time, an ethical-political gesture more important than

thinking of equality, which in his interpretation had failed (Rodrigues, 2011).²

The question of woman as a figure of alterity reappeared at a time when Beauvoir dialogued with Hegel, specifically with the dialectic between the master and slave, at that key point of *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (2011) in which the conscious becomes conscious of itself based on an interdependence between the I and the other. The passage was interpreted by Beauvoir as another effort to attribute to woman the place of a dependent, bound to an animal life, incapable of ascending to the field of culture. She begins with the argument that in the dialectic between the master and slave, Subject is the Absolute and the Other is the immanent, which would mean, for Beauvoir, maintaining the idea that man is the subject and woman is the other, that which is constituted in an identity of the oppressed or the secondary. Women would not be, according to Beauvoir, capable of identifying themselves as the origin of alterity or of obtaining recognition without also constituting themselves as *subjects*. Destined to the place of the “other”, a woman could not, still within Beauvoir’s argument, follow the Hegelian script to demand recognition.

In this criticism, Beauvoir entered the history of philosophy as the first woman thinker to indicate that there is no script for contemplating the constitution of woman as *subject*, given that even philosophers who formulated a concept of subject based on its relation with alterity offer only two possibilities: that women are impeded from becoming subjects; and that women should take the only route available, that which formed men subjects and confines them as the other of the man, relegating the woman to the place of the “second sex”, which gives title to the book. Therefore, the experience of freedom considered in the realm of existentialism would only be accessible to men.

² About this debate between Beauvoir and Lévinas, which will not be examined more here, see the article “A costela de Adão: diferenças sexuais a partir de Lévinas” (Rodrigues, 2011).

With my initial recourse to homophony, I am able to think that Beauvoir was facing two inseparable problems: one is not born woman, because woman is forged by culture; one is not woman, because if not, there is an essence to the human, and there cannot be an essence to the woman. It would thus be necessary to call for the right to existence in the sense that existentialism gives to the term. I understand that it is for this reason that part of Beauvoir's debate with Hegel concerns the distinction between activity and function and to the pair immanence-transcendence. Giving birth, nursing and caring would be natural functions in which, Beauvoir argues, a woman would not have reason to affirm her existence, but only to passively support her biological destiny. Beauvoir differentiates the power of man to provide food from the woman's destiny to nurse. While man provides food as an activity, transcending his animal condition, the woman remains restricted to the mere natural function. In this way, she argues, it is not natural life that has a supreme value for humanity, but the life that serves purposes more important than itself.

Her misfortune is to have been biologically destined to repeat Life, while in her own eyes Life in itself does not provide her reasons for being, and these reasons are more important than life itself (Beauvoir, 2009:99).

In other words, it is not nature, but culture, that gives life value, and moreover, nature is not the origin of life that has value. In the terms presented by Beauvoir, pure natural life – attributed to women, for which Butler would say that only a woman has a body – is *foreclosed* as the origin of cultural life with value.

The same French Hegel was the object of Butler's doctoral thesis, which examined, in the French reception of the German philosopher, the relationship between desire and recognition based on the following question: how is it that the constitution of the subject entails a radical and constitutive relation to alterity? (Butler, 1999:XIV). It is important to remember that Butler is

engaged in the same issues as the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, which considers the subject to be in a permanent process of expropriation; a subject whose constitution is marked by the risk of losing the self, in movements for which there is no definitive moment of restoration and which here I am provocatively calling *différance*, highlighting a relationship between Hegel and Derrida that Derrida insisted on mitigating (Safatle, 2014).³

Using a reading of Beauvoir's book that I can call "deconstructionist", Butler raises new concerns for the process of "deontologization of existence", rethinking the subject and its relation with alterity, and, to a large degree, agreeing with Beauvoir. In Butler's reading,

For Beauvoir, the "subject", within the existential analytic of misogyny, is always already masculine, conflated with the universal, differentiating itself from a feminine Other, outside the universalizing norms of personhood, hopelessly particular," embodied, condemned to immanence. Although Beauvoir is often understood to be calling for the right of women, in effect, to become existential subjects, and hence, for inclusion within the terms of an abstract universality, her position also implies a fundamental critique of the very disembodiment of the abstract male epistemological subject (Butler, 1990:11).

Butler wants to call attention to the problem that the abstract universal subject denies its corporal marking and projects this embodiment – disavowed and disparaged, to use her terms – in the feminine sphere. Only a woman has a body, and it functions as a foundation for restrictions, while the male body becomes the "incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom" (Butler, 1990:16).

I would like to return to arguments that I used in my master's and doctoral studies, in which I confronted the criticism of the

³ The Hegel "mitigated" in the philosophy of Derrida is an expression that I borrow from an interlocution with Vladimir Safatle.

subject in Butler with the criticism of the subject in the philosophy of Derrida (Rodrigues, 2008; 2011). The debate that I established concerned the comprehension of identity as *ipseidade*, as I identical to self, closed to alterity, a question that mobilized authors critical of the centrality of the concept of subject and the decisive importance of the theme for feminist theory to confront a supposed neutrality of the subject. Much of my initial research involved investigating the irony contained in this affirmation by Butler: “There is the refrain that, just now, when the women are beginning to assume the place of subjects, postmodern positions come along to announce that the subject is dead (Butler, 1992:14).

If for Beauvoir it was essential that women could also have existence – without which there would not be the promised exercise of freedom of existentialism – for Butler, politics became the very terms in which the existence of the subject was affirmed. Beauvoir writes in a context in which philosophy still sustained a model of abstract universal subject under which it subjugated the overlapping between neutrality and male. Fifty years later, Butler was writing in a context in which the concept of subject had been challenged because of the exclusion that it carried. In the field of the criticism of the ontological subject and its necessary relationship with feminist theory, I turn to a passage from an interview in which Derrida discusses whom the concept of subject serves:

Authority and autonomy (for even if this is submitted to law, this subjection is freedom) they are, in this scheme, granted first to man (homo and vir) before woman, and before woman than animal. And, clearly, to the adult before the child. The virile strength of the adult male, father, husband or son (the canon of friendship, as I demonstrated elsewhere, privileges the fraternal scheme) belongs to the scheme that dominates the concept of subject (Derrida, 2018:178-179).

In my argument, Butler’s path – the radical criticism of the need for a feminist politics that is founded on a single and

permanent base, which would only function within the idea of identity – is to defend the hypothesis that the subject of feminism does not disappear, but comes to be understood as unpredictable, undetermined and ambiguous, to add a term from the vocabulary of Beauvoir which fits very well here. “The deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated. This kind of critique brings into question the foundationalist frame in which feminism as an identity political has been articulated”, she writes (Butler, 1990:203), to ask: “if the claim of emancipation is not made by the female subject, whom to emancipate?” (Butler, 1990:79). I understand that Butler is proposing to shift feminist politics from the field of humanism – which presupposes the subject as fixed identity – to interrogate the very terms of politics, whatever they are, that of creating a presumption – the subject – fixed to an unstable reality – male and female subjects.

From gender to intersectionality

If it is true that in the debate about the relationship between subject and alterity Beauvoir and Butler share references, it is also true that when Butler uses Beauvoir to go beyond what the French author had formulated, Butler makes an excessively fast passage from the subject to gender. As Maria Luiza Femenias also observed (2012), Butler turns to the formulation “*On ne naît pas femme, on devient*” to soon after operate a deconstruction of the pair sex-gender, without considering that the concept of gender is not found in the work of the French philosopher, given that it appeared only later. But it is also true that, even if posteriori, feminist theories came to consider Beauvoir as one of the origins of the concept of gender as social construction, a marker of the asymmetry of relations between men and women (Heilborn; Rodrigues, 2013; 2018).⁴ In my reading, one of the countless

⁴ I would like to refer to the debate about the concept of gender that I have undertaken with Maria Luiza Heilborn, both in classrooms and in articles we have written together: “Gênero e pós-gênero: um debate político” [Gender and post-

interlocutors that Beauvoir confronts in “The Second Sex”, is the modern concept that the philosopher J.J. Rousseau attributed to sexual difference, allocating men as subjects of rights in public life and women as those subjected to private life, understood as support for men, so that they can exercise their citizenship and participate in the social contract.

Beauvoir would thus be demonstrating how it was necessary to forge, during the course of modern history, the education, culture and social life that would maintain sexual difference very well delimited. In this sense, her contribution to thinking of the passage of the female that is born, as a biological given of birth, to the woman who *becomes* from the “civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine” (Beauvoir, 2009:330), is fundamental for the elaboration of the concept of gender. However, Beauvoir does not formulate the pair sex-gender against which Butler aims her criticism, and which originated in different paths that cross. In terms of Butler’s philosophy, an important clue to follow is the anthropology of Gayle Rubin (1975).

Rubin is one of the main interlocutors in the criticism of the sex-gender system, which the anthropologist identifies in both the confrontation with the concept of elementary kinship structures in Lévi-Strauss and in the Freudian proposal of the Oedipus Complex. Fifteen years after Rubin’s essay, Butler writes *Gender Trouble* and adds a new problem to the pair sex-gender to indicate that “intelligible genders” would only be those supported in relations of coherence and continuity between sex, gender sexual practice and desire, which would only be possible if we can discern the biological, psychic, discursive and social elements. The problem of intelligibility will reappear ten years later in *Antigona’s claim* (2002) and is maintained in the debate about the distinctive elements between livable lives and killable lives. Another important interlocutor in *Gender Trouble* is Monique Wittig (1993) – whose

gender: a political debate] “Gênero: breve história de um conceito” [Gender: brief history of a concept].

criticism of Beauvoir precedes that of Butler, who closely followed Wittig – to reach the following point: to think of sexual difference in terms of compulsory heterosexuality would be much more powerful than thinking of it only from the concept of gender, which is still tied to the male-female binary.

The identification of women with “sex”, for Beauvoir as for Wittig, is a conflation of the category of women with the ostensibly sexualized features of their bodies and, hence, a refusal to grant freedom and autonomy to women as it is purportedly enjoyed by men. Thus, the destruction of the category of sex would be the destruction of an *attribute*, sex, that has, through a misogynist gesture of *synecdoche*, come to take the place of the person, the self-determining cogito. In other words, only men are “persons”, and there is no gender but the feminine (Butler, 1990:27).

At that time, through the reading of Wittig, the criticism of the abstract universal subject was based on the perception of the insufficiency of the concept of gender because of its binaryism, giving the impression that Butler’s criticism of gender would pull Beauvoir’s proposal along with it. I return to Femenías:

Butler does not intend to comprehend Beauvoir’s phenomenological and existentialist position, it is not an exegesis of the thinking of the French philosopher. To the contrary, it seems to me that she takes it as a starting point to develop her own theory and thus give foundation to a performative concept of “agency” and in a broad sense of “politics” (Femenías, 2012:313).

Butler deconstructed the binary pair of sex-gender but not to destroy it – which would lead to the understanding that, if the duality sex-gender was essential to the feminist movement, its destruction would lead to its abandonment. There is a recurring confusion between destruction, deconstruction and criticism. Butler read Beauvoir not to “renounce all the openings offered” by the French thinker, but to go beyond them, for this reason I argue that

Gender Trouble would not have been written without *The Second Sex*. It would also be by closely following Wittig that Butler would take the first step towards criticism of gender identity – which during the book shifts to performativity of gender – to say that there is a problem in the “conclusion that a person is a gender and is a gender by virtue of his sex, his psychic feeling of the self, and the different expressions of this psychic self, the most remarkable of them being that of sexual desire” (Butler, 1990:141). We can understand that her historic political gesture is to indicate that there is no *gender truth* (Butler, 2003:195), just as Beauvoir had indicated that there is no *truth of sex*.

The debate about the subject raised the need to discuss identity as that which defines and circumscribes the I; here gender identity is already a problem aimed at feminist politics and the limitations of representing “woman”. Another author enters the scene who, in the context of this article, will be of great help:

(...) there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term “women” denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, “women”, even in the plural, has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety. As Denise Riley’s title suggests, “*Am I that name?*”⁵ is a question produced by the very possibility of the name’s multiple significations. If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted

⁵ This is also the question that Desdemona asks Iago when Othello accuses her of being a prostitute, already indicating the tragic aspect of naming of a man in relation to the woman, marked both by the name by which she is designated and by her patronymic, which is also given by the family relationship with the man, whether father or husband (Spivak, 1997).

identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (Butler, 1990:4-5).

The quote offers wealthy ideas for thinking about both the need to reexamine the objectives of feminist politics, no longer to be conducted in defense of a “gender identity”, and to indicate the moment of passage from gender to intersectionality. Butler is dialoguing with Denise Riley (1988) who in turn is reviving the famous question raised by the black abolitionist Sojourner Truth (1851): “*Ain’t I a Woman?*”. The question is accompanied by the problem of black women; associated to the physical labor of slavery, they could not identify as fragile and therefore, could not be recognized as women. Riley begins her book shifting Truth’s question to “Ain’t I a fluctuating identity?”, with which Butler aligns when she argues that the refusal of the identity “women” would be necessary for feminism. One of the questions in debate in feminist theory in the 1980s was the shift from the concept of woman – which in the singular appears to be too restrictive – to women, which in the plural could attempt to embrace irreducible differences: whites and blacks, Westerners and Asians, rich and poor, heterosexuals and lesbians, to only present the most obvious examples. Riley and Butler arrive at this conversation with the argument that simply substituting “woman” for “women” is not sufficient, in an exercise in which it is difficult to break from the category and simultaneously maintain the feminist struggle, as can be read in Riley:

(...) “women” is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned, so that the apparent continuity of the subject of “women” isn’t to be relied on; “women” is both synchronically and diachronically erratic as a collectivity, while for the individual, “being a woman” is also inconstant, and can’t provide as an ontological foundation. Yet it must be emphasised that these instabilities of the category are the

sine qua non of feminism, which would otherwise be lost for an object, despoiled of a fight, and, in short, without much life (Riley, 1988:2).

Butler's argument is very close to this, in the same difficult exercise of conciliating the criticism of gender as social construction, is the problem of conducting feminist politics supposing a stability of the category "women" and not even in this way getting rid of feminism as a cause (Riley, 1988:3).⁶ To radicalize the *devir* as Beauvoir considered, Butler lends markings to subjects through the intersectionality between gender, race, class, religion, place of birth, place of residence, age, choice of sexual object, corporal coherence, schooling etc. Being is *devir* in the materiality of a body in a constant process of marking. The next step would be to think of how these markings function to separate the lives that have value from those that do not, which she does in dialog with Michel Foucault's biopolitics and the necropolitics of Achille Mbembe.

Final considerations

It seems to me to be necessary to conclude with a reflection that revises the debate Butler engaged in with Beauvoir in the 1990s and the issues it raised. Beauvoir's work is vast, it does not begin or end in this phrase that is so decisive for the history of feminist theory. Butler's work is also vast and is also not restricted to *Gender Troubles*, and has sparked developments that are essential to contemporary feminism. I consider it mistaken to produce disputes between the two, especially because I am convinced that the way that Butler read Beauvoir can teach us

⁶ There are other proximities between Riley and Butler, among which I would like to highlight: "What's suggested here is that the volatility of 'women' is so marked that it makes feminist alliances with other tendencies as difficult as they are inescapable" (Riley, 1998:4). Butler proposed precisely this by speaking of "contingent alliances" and in this way, opening feminism, and particularly the debate about gender, to beyond identity politics.

some things about methods of reading that go beyond commentary, and moreover, function as a guide for addressing political and epistemological questions. If I can argue that this was the primordial gesture of Butler's reading, it is because I believe that the gesture does nothing to detract from Beauvoir's work, to the contrary, it finds a strength in it that had not yet been manifested.

If this is the case, then perhaps I can say that the current relevance of the debate between Butler and Beauvoir is in recognizing that nearly 20 years ago it produced another guide to understanding contemporary gender problems. In this sense, I would like to conclude by returning to the vigorous campaign against Butler and against many of us as feminists, who were accused of making "gender ideology". This is an expression forged in the realm of the Catholic Church that is used to classify all theory based on the concept of gender as being on a path of destruction of the values of women and families. Identified by forces of the far right and by conservative Catholics as one of the main "gender ideologues", Butler confronts the definitions of "gender ideology" by revising Beauvoir's arguments on her own terms, which do not seem to me to be inappropriate to the thinking of the French feminist philosopher, particularly considering that in Beauvoir, the body is neither totally free, nor totally determined.

Crucially for Beauvoir, "sex" is from the very start part of one's historical situation. "Sex" is not denied, but its meaning is disputed: nothing about being assigned female at birth determines what kind of life a woman will lead and what the meaning of being a woman might be. Indeed, many trans people are assigned one sex at birth, only to claim another one in the course of their lives. And if we build on the logic of Beauvoir's "existentialist" account of social construction, then one may be born a female, but become a man (Butler, 2019:n/p).

This passage allows me to return to one of the initial arguments, which is, that if Beauvoir's statement were to be rewritten by Butler, it could be "*on naît/n'est pas, on devient*" or "one is not born, one is not, but rather becomes, through *différance*". Thus we must face at least two problems: 1) there is no natural base for the human, which is "in permanent tension between determinism and freedom"; 2) becomes [devenir] is a permanent process that constitutes the human as unfinished, open, troubled, agitated, inconstant, trembling (Butler, 1990).⁷ What can be so threatening in discovering that we are less stable? Even if this freedom is limited, because it always is, the portion of freedom that is possible for us is a bit greater than the sole path of essentialist determinism. From my perspective, what is most threatening in the homophony that I propose here is that it may cast us into the contamination between nature and culture that modernity believed it had delimited, into the disturbance between human and inhuman that the history of philosophy has always tried to avoid (Safatle, 2015).⁸

Upon returning to Beauvoir, I will find women like those restricted to the field of immanence, natural life, without recognition as subject and therefore without a possible script for existence, without power to enter the field of the human, which is restricted to man. If I return to how Butler reads this perspective of Beauvoir, I will find the hypothesis that it is not only gender that produces this exclusion of existence identified by the French philosopher, and that every body can be banned from the field of the human:

⁷ The word "trouble" comes from the old French, *truble*, which can also signify state of agitation, disturbance, which is within the objectives of Butler's book *Gender Trouble*.

⁸ "We are so tied to seeking recognition from other subjects, we need the consent they offer so much, that we forget how what often comforts us, what really tells us that we are at home, is to be recognized by an animal, it is to be recognized by something that, after all, is not conscious of its self. Animals perceive the animals that we are, they remember us from "below" the individuality in respect to which we are never able to completely distance ourselves" (Safatle, 2015:282).

The very fact that I can ask which humans are recognized as human and which are not means that there is a distinct field of the human that remains unrecognizable, according to dominant norms, but which is obviously recognizable within the epistemic field opened up by counterhegemonic forms of knowing. On the one hand, this is a clear contradiction: one group of humans is recognized as human and another group of humans, ones who are human, is not recognized as human (Butler, 2015:36).

The distinction between human and nonhuman as a marker of recognition has been worked with from the perspective of who has and who does not have the right to struggle, a marker that distinguishes lives that count as lives and those that do not count. In my approach, it is necessary to recognize, both in the Brazilian context, and in the global context of the expansion of the political and religious forces of the far right, that every body marked by the female element becomes a killable body, which I have called structural feminicide – analogous to structural racism identified by Foucault (2005:306). In what I am calling, still as a hypothesis, structural feminicide, there would be an absolute denial of femininity, of the female and of the woman. If the criticism of machismo in social life is driven by the possibilities that the pair sex-gender provided as a guide to understanding the forms of hierarchy between men and women in society, culture and social relations, thoughts that – like those of Butler based on Beauvoir – allow us to go beyond the pair sex-gender as a foundation of the discriminations can encourage thinking that there is something more, the desire to eliminate all bodies marked as female, moved by aversion, horror, abjection. What I am calling structural feminicide would be present in the entire institutional, economic and legal apparatus that orders social life not only to subjugate women as “gender” but also to eliminate the female and femininity as marks of sexual bodies. Thus, if Beauvoir allowed women to be recognized as subjects, there is still something that makes us secondary when the natural foundation of the female

becomes troubled. To shake this natural foundation is to expose the arbitrariness of the violence against certain forms of life in detriment to others, it is to denounce that power is exercised in the name of necropower. Finally, the structural feminicide can be linked to the need for a *foreclosure* of the female from the mark of the human, a female whose trouble appears to need to be annihilated in order to support a reason that is white, male, European, colonizing, heteronormative, and impotent, and thus, increasingly violent.

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