UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

'Luce Irigaray and "la Femme Civile": the application of the social-symbolic to female citizenship'.

Submitted by Cécile Velu for a PhD degree in the School of Modern Languages, French department.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the *Ministère de la Solidarité entre les Générations, Service des Droits des Femmes*, especially Nadia Madir, for their help and advice and for letting me use the facilities of the centre on numerous occasions.

Many thanks to the staff of *La Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand* and to *La Librairie des Femmes* for enabling me to have access to documents I could not have found anywhere else.

I am also very grateful to women from *La Maison des Femmes*, especially to Odette Brun, Monique Dental and Maïté Beigner for their cooperation and kindness.

Special thanks to friends and colleagues, particularly Florence Myles, Bill Marshall, Anne Jäckel, Gisela Shaw and Jean Grimshaw, who have been very supportive and understanding. I am particularly indebted to Erica Carter, Tamsin Wilton and Julie Kent for their friendship and comments which have been most helpful.

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Mike Kelly, for his continous support, encouragement and academic guidance.

Without Jan's patience and invaluable support, none of this work could have been achieved.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of Richard.

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ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS - FRENCH -
Doctor of Philosophy

'LUCE IRIGARAY AND "LA FEMME CIVILE": THE APPLICATION OF THE SOCIAL-SYMBOLIC TO FEMALE CITIZENSHIP'

by Cécile Velu

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that Luce Irigaray's theory of the social-symbolic can be can pragmatically applied to women's everyday life.

Chapter One refers to Irigaray's critique of Western thought to argue that the Lacanian theory of symbolic order and Hegelian concepts of consciousness and rationality can be interpreted as acts of symbolic violence negating female subjectivity. The debate related to symbolic violence also draws on Bourdieu's approach.

In chapter Two, Irigaray's proposition to create female genealogy is discussed in relation to the positioning of the female speaking subject as a legitimate subject of enunciation. The social symbolic, in this chapter, is analysed as the legitimization of the 'sensible transcendental', that is the rehabilitation of the association between matter and spirit. The Irigarian notions of Intersubjectivity and '*le travail du négatif*' are also discussed.

In chapter Three, the social-symbolic is examined in terms of its pragmatic application to women's rights and socio-cultural practices. A parallel is drawn between '*La Femme Civile*', '*Les Droits Sexués*','*Civilité*' and women's needs and existing rights in contemporary French society. The Republican French motto: '*Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*' is also used to contextualize the debate on citizenship.

Chapter Four examines the possibility of applying Irigaray's principles of female subjectivity and '*La Femme Civile*' to lesbians. The concept of 'contiguity', is used to argue for the autonomy of the lesbian sexual subject. Irigaray's claim for 'sexuate rights' and '*Civilité*' is critically examined by setting the argument on the social-symbolic in the current lesbian debate on visibility and rights.

The thesis concludes that the function of '*La Femme Civile*' is to materialize and politicize the reality of the legitimate female subject in society. Although some of Irigaray's propositions can only work as guidelines to be adapted to specific situations or as strategies aiming to assert women's status and rights, Irigaray's project for female citizenship is central to the current feminist agenda.

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INTRODUCTION

Luce Irigaray has always been and still is the theorist of Sexual Difference.[1] From the publication of *Speculum, De L'Autre Femme* in 1974, until 1986, her work mainly consisted of a critique of traditional discourses on the construction of subjectivity. Her intention was to show how such discourses had falsified reality by denying women the right to be posited as subjects in the same capacity as men, particularly in the domains of psychoanalysis and philosophy. Women's oppression in society was therefore explained by discourses of exclusion implicitly justified by patriarchy.

In 1987 Irigaray's thought started to take a different turn. It became a project of reconstruction rather than a reversal, *renversement*, which is a term the philosopher uses to refer to her method of deconstruction of the dominant discourse.

> J'étais l'autre de/pour l'homme, j'ai tenté de définir l'altérité objective de moi pour moi en tant qu'appartenant au genre féminin. J'ai opéré un renversement de la féminité qui m'était imposée pour tenter de définir le féminin correspondant à mon genre: l'en-soi-pour-soi de ma nature féminine.[2]

In this statement Irigaray stresses the fact that the

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[1] Sexual Difference written with capital 'S' and 'D' refers to Irigaray's own theory whereas sexual difference written with lower-case 's' and 'd' is applied to the notion of sex opposed to that of gender as used by Anglo-American feminists.

[2] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire*, (Paris: Grasset,1992),p. 108.

female subject has to exist for herself, with her own specificity, as a sex and an entity, that is to say, as a subject whose sex is not the mark of an inferiority or a pathology but a potential of realisation in the symbolic and in society. This potential is therefore not to be confined to sexuality or reproduction. This is why the philosopher has outlined a series of proposals aiming to turn Sexual Difference into a culture whose practices she would like to see implemented in contemporary society. This project has been formulated through her most recent work: *Le Temps de la Différence: Pour une Révolution Pacifique*,1989, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence*, 1990, *Sexes et Genres à travers les Langues*,1990, *J'Aime à Toi: Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* and *Le Souffle des Femmes: Luce Irigaray présente des credos au féminin*, 1996.[3]

Such an undertaking is relevant to the current feminist debate on women's status and rights focusing on the reshaping of identities and the reform of institutions. In France, for example, the movement *Parité* mainly concentrates its efforts on women's status and rights with regards to local representation and new legislation at the European level. Because of continuous disagreements between various feminist theorists and activists, there is no direct cooperation between Luce Irigaray and the

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[3] See bibliography for details on these publications

women involved in this political movement, which gathers women academics, politicians, representatives of female activists coming from the grassroot movements of the 1970s as well as men from different parties or movements from the left. However, the purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the relevance of Irigaray's work to contemporary feminist preoccupations. This is why I have chosen to analyse Irigaray's theory of female subjectivity as an inescapable part of female citizenship. Consequently, if Sexual Difference is to be accepted as a culture representing a potential reality to be inscribed in women's history, it can and must be taken into account by the current feminist debate on citizenship. Since the late 1980s, Irigaray has worked with Italian feminists such as Luisa Muraro. She has also been invited to present her work during a meeting organized by the Italian communist party for the election of Renzo Imbeni to the European Parliament in 1989. This sort of intervention demonstrates that Irigaray's project is not a utopia. It emphasizes her firm intention to materialize her project on Sexual Difference by actualizing it in the current political discussion on women's role in society.

Irigaray's advocacy of Sexual Difference has sometimes been misunderstood or even misinterpreted. There are several reasons for that: perhaps because some of Irigaray's work has not been translated or not as

accurately translated as it might have been, but also because it was simply misread and still is by certain feminists in France. She was often said to be essentialist because of the importance she attaches to sexual difference. One example of this misreading is illustrated by critiques formulated by Colette Guillaumin, Maryse Guerlais and Christine Delphy.[4] Other French feminists such as Françoise Collin, philosopher and editor of the review 'Cahiers du Grif' do acknowledge the need to rethink sexual difference but do not support Irigaray's theory in its entirety.[5]

Very interestingly, however, the work carried out by Elizabeth Grosz and Margaret Whitford rectified these misreadings by interpreting Irigaray's theory of Sexual Difference in a more accurate and objective way. One of their merits is to have replaced Irigaray's work in the Anglo-American feminist context. Grosz with *Sexual*

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[4] Christine Delphy, 'Libération des Femmes ou droits corporatistes des mères', Maryse Guerlais, 'Vers une nouvelle idéologie du droit statutaire: *Le Temps de la Différence* de Luce Irigaray', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes: Particularisme et Universalime*, 16-17-18, ed. by Christine Delphy (Condé sur Noireau: Corlet, Imprimeur, S.A.,1991), pp.63-92,pp.93-118.

Colette Guillaumin, *Sexe, Race et Pratique du Pouvoir: l'Idée de Nature* (Paris:Côté-Femmes Edition,1992).

[5] Françoise Collin, 'Le corps v(i)olé' & 'Les Bords', in *Le Les Cahiers du Griff:Le Corps des Femmes* (Bruxelles:Editions Complexes,1992),pp.21-44,pp.129-145. Françoise Collin also talked to me about the necessity of theorizing sexual difference in an interview she gave me in June 1992.

Subversions: Three French Feminists published in 1989 and Whitford with *Luce Irigaray:Philosophy in the Feminine*, and *The Irigaray Reader: Luce Irigaray*, both published in 1991.[6] They presented Irigaray as a feminist philosopher, a status which was denied to her, especially in France where her work was and still is confined to the domain of psychoanalysis and sometimes linguistics. One of the reasons for this classification is because Irigaray, like most active feminist academics, does not belong to any of the official schools of thought which have well-known men at their head.

Throughout their analyses of Irigaray's thought, Grosz and Whitford both stress the fact that Irigaray's analysis is not simply a deconstruction of patriarchy based on an essentialist approach to femininity. They introduce Irigaray as an innovative radical thinker who challenges traditional Western thought.

> Irigaray's... writing, her 'styles', involve new forms of discourse, new ways of speaking, a 'poetry' which is necessarily innovative and evocative of new conceptions of women and feminity.[7]

> Irigaray is too important to ignore; she is trying to *think* sexual difference in the strong sense of the term - to bring into existence the unthought and the unsymbolized, an endeavour she shares with most

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[6] Elizabeth Grosz also refers to Irigaray in *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990).

[7] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists*, (Sydney, Allen & Unwin,1989),p.101.

grassroots activists.[8]

These new approaches enable readers to rediscover Irigaray's work or simply encourage new readership and studies of Sexual Difference. My understanding and analysis of Irigaray's work is situated within Grosz's and Whitford's perspectives.[9]

Irigaray's work has generated a vast number of critiques and studies throughout the world. My intention is not to engage in a critical analysis of her theory of Sexual Difference but to interpret her work on '*La Femme Civile*'. At this stage what is more interesting is to assess the way in which her body of thought can be productively applied. None of Irigaray's critiques have concentrated on the possibility of implementing her theory of 'civility' in precise areas of women's everyday life. The relevance of her work to current feminist issues such as mothers'rights in society or women's status as a 'civil entity', '*La Femme Civile*', has not been looked at. This

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[8] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*(London:Routledge,1991),p.5. The term *think* is in italics in the original text, probably to indicate the importance of rearticulating sexual difference as an independent way of thinking.

[9] I am grateful to both Grosz and Whitford. To Grosz for letting me have one of the papers on French feminism she gave in London during the conference on psychoanalysis at the Institute of Romance Studies in 1991. To Whitford for granting me an interview at the beginning of my research, in 1991, on her work on Irigaray.

is partly due to the fact that Irigaray is mainly considered to be a theorist rather than a pragmatic thinker whose propositions may be adopted or adapted to fit in with feminist answers to prevailing problems of women in contemporary society. Another new facet of this research is the interpretation of Irigaray's notions of 'being', '*l'être*', and 'having', '*l'avoir*', which are central to the discussion on subjectivity and principles of citizenship.

The aim of this thesis is twofold: firstly, I want to demonstrate that Irigaray's theory of Sexual Difference must be understood in terms of its relevant cultural practices, the outline of which the philosopher has drawn since 1989 in her latest publications. Secondly, I also wish to stress the need to understand Irigaray's theory of the female subject as the first necessary step in the reconstruction of female citizenship. Her most recent concern with rights specific to women may appear to be controversial at first. Nevertheless her interest in this domain underlines her wish to make concrete proposals capable of empowering what she calls 'the Civil Woman', '*La Femme Civile*', a concept which I argue, can be interpreted as a form a female citizenship. According to my postulate, the status of the female subject in the symbolic, whose purpose is to give women the power to name, only makes sense if it can be materialized by women's power to act as

female citizens in their own right in society. If women are to be recognized as legitimate citizens, that is to say, as citizens who can participate in the ruling of the polis on an equal footing with men, their status of subjects in the symbolic cannot be denied. Both aspects, subjectivity and citizenship become interactive in order to function effectively.

I do not claim that Irigaray's culture of Sexual Difference can offer a global answer or even a solution to women's needs nowadays. However, I suggest that some of her propositions related to the 'the Civil Woman' can act as a guideline which should be read as an intention to politicize her initial project of reconstruction.

In order to attempt to link theory and practice in Irigaray's work in terms of women's everyday life, I have adopted the following methodology. Chapters One and Two state the theoretical part of my argument by revisiting the Irigarian theory of female subjectivity. Chapters Three and Four evaluate the possibility of applying cultural practices of Sexual Difference to women's life in contemporary society. The aim of this structure is to assess the validity of the relationship between theory and practice from an empirical point of view rather than from a philosophical or psychoanalytical position. I also endeavour to show that Irigaray's latest work cannot be

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understood or dissociated from her previous studies as is sometimes believed. The work carried out since 1989 is a logical progression of Irigaray's thought which not only underlines her desire to materialize her theory but also to keep it in line with the evolution of women's needs and history.

Chapter One, 'The Politics of Universality', is a critique of the construction of male subjectivity in Western thought, based on Irigaray's deconstructive approach to Lacan and Hegel, who are chosen as two representatives of dominant male discourse. The objective of this chapter is to demonstrate that Western thought can be interpreted as a form of symbolic violence reinforcing the process of negation of female subjectivity. Chapter Two, 'From Enunciation to Female Genealogy: A Reconstructive Project of the Female Subject', examines the possibility of reconstructing a symbolic space where the female subject can posit herself as a speaking female subject, that is to say, as a speaking subject who has the power to name. It draws on Irigaray's proposition regarding the creation of female genealogy. Chapters Three and Four examine the way in which the Irigarian model of the female subject can be practically applied to women in general at first, and then to a category of women in particular. In chapter Three, entitled 'Sexuate Rights, "the Civil Woman" and Society', Irigaray's notion of

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'civility' is interpreted in terms of citizenship presented as the application of female subectivity in society. Irigaray's propositions illustrating her concept of 'social symbolic' are assessed in the light of existing rights for women in contemporary France. Chapter Four, '"The Civil Woman" and Lesbian Citizenship', is the application of the 'social symbolic' to lesbians. The purpose of this last chapter is to find out to what extent the Irigarian notions of sexual subjectivity, sexuate rights and 'civility' can work for lesbians. The reason why I have chosen to look at a particular category of women is because differences between women is a priority in current feminist thought and activism. Although Irigaray does not specifically address this issue, it is important to show how her work can be used in the context of sexual politics and therefore be part of current feminist priorities.

The main objective of my thesis is to underline the indispensability of linking the symbolic to the social in order to understand the relevance of Irigaray's work to women's lives and their desire to assert themselves in society.

The aspects of citizenship I have touched on are relevant to specific viewpoints taken from Irigaray's latest work. They do not claim to deal with the question of citizenship for women in a comprehensive way. The very

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idea of interpreting 'the Civil Woman' as a political realization of the female subject gives a new way of understanding Irigaray's perspective. This has not been done before, since it has not seemed relevant or possible to read and, perhaps more importantly, to use her work as part of a political feminist agenda aiming to improve women's standing. It therefore no longer seems appropriate to study her work without considering the pertinence of the claims she makes in the defence of what I have interpreted as sexuate citizenship.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICS OF UNIVERSALITY AND FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY

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In order to analyse the way in which female identity has been shaped, Luce Irigaray deconstructs the psychoanalytic theory of the symbolic as well as the Western philosophical approach to consciousness and subjectivity. Western thought, according to Irigaray and other feminist thinkers, corresponds to the principles of reality, truth and knowledge imposed by Western male philosophers who have appropriated these principles by positing themselves as the only legitimate human beings capable of understanding and producing logical thinking. Hence, feminists'constant referral to the term *Logos* described by Grosz as follows:

> *Logos, Logocentrism.* These terms designate the dominant form of metaphysics in Western thought. The *logos*, logic, reason, knowledge, represents a singular and unified conceptual order, one which seems to grasp the presence or immediacy of things. Logocentrism is a system of thought centred around the dominance of this singular logic of presence.[1]

The presence Grosz alludes to, here, is that of the male subject whose very existence is enough to justify the dominant system of thought. The value of this system derives from the fact that it is determined by patriarchy which also defines its symbolic and social order. The male knower is an abstract knower who is disembodied. This is the case, for example for influential philosophers such as Descartes who thought that one could doubt the existence of the body. The denial of the role of the body in the

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[1] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p. xix.

construction of identity is common to most male philosophers, from Plato to contemporary philosophers, including postmodern thinkers such as Derrida. Class, sex and race do not play any part in the pursuit of knowledge in Western philosophy.

Those areas are precisely what feminist thinkers have questioned.

> The abstract conception of the knower. What does it mean? It means that 'the knower' is thought of as a 'mind' whose operations can be theorised in abstraction from any questions about who the knower is. In traditional epistemology, there is usually a focus on what is known or claimed to be known; what is much less often asked is who is claiming to know. Another way of putting this is to say that there is a focus on the object rather than the subject of knowledge.[2]

Feminists may differ in their analysis of male dominance in the construction of knowledge and identity; they may also differ in the alternatives they offer to the annihilating 'presence' of the male subject of enunciation. However, they all agree that this logic of 'presence', imposed by *logocentrism* which dominates identity politics, must be challenged in order to resituate the identity and the position of the knower.

> Feminists argue that, because dualistic thinking is so fundamental to political philosophy, only by merging the public and private worlds in a new feminist philosophy can progress be made.[3]

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[2] Unpublished lecture notes, Jean Grimshaw, 'Feminism and Knowledge',1995.

[3] Maggie Humm, *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* (London:Harvester Wheatsheaf,1989),p.164.

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Irigaray's approach is similar to that of other feminists although her first book, *Speculum*, published in 1974, has positioned her as a leading figure amongst feminist theorists.

The expression, Western Thought, therefore acts as a form of consensus recurring in various feminist discourses, whether they are produced by women or men. There is no general acceptance that Western philosophy is logocentric, despite the influence of postmodern philosophers such as Derrida who underlined the logocentric characteristics of Western thought although his deconstructive approach is more of a strategy than a wish to reposit the female subject as a legitimate knower. Referring to Derrida, Grosz writes the following:

> Deconstruction is neither a destruction of prevailing intellectual norms and theoretical ideals, nor their replacement or reconstruction by new, more acceptable forms. Deconstruction in its technical sense refers to a series of tactics and devices rather than a method: strategies to reveal the unarticulated presuppositions on which metaphysical and logocentric texts are based.[4]

According to Luce Irigaray, patriarchal psychoanalytic and philosophical thought has created a model of subjectivity corresponding to an alienating system where women can only exist as sub-categories constructed by the male subject:

> Le "sujet"... A lui seul masculin, féminin, et leurs rapports... le sujet... Au regard duquel tout *dehors*

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[4] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p. xv.

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> reste toujours condition de possibilité de l'image et de la reproduction de soi.[5]

In psychoanalytical terms, Man is the ultimate point of reference and presence. This is the case for Lacan, for instance, for whom Woman embodies a lack or an absence. In philosophical discourse, consciousness is Man's prerogative but Woman is only capable of reaching a secondary level of consciousness, as shown by Hegelian theory.[6]

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate, following Irigaray's analysis, that both approaches deny women the possibility of being subjects of enunciation. The first part of my argument therefore attempts to corroborate the feminist assumption that Western philosophy is a logocentric discourse which denies women the possibility of being legitimate speaking subjects and hence of having the power to name. The second part of the discussion will interpret this denial as an act of symbolic violence.

For Irigaray, enunciation is the situation which establishes a link between the existing symbolic and social structures determining the position of the speaker as a producer of statements, *énoncés*, whether it is a sentence or

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[5] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum: de l'Autre Femme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1974),p.168.

[6] Both approaches will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

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a discourse. The philosopher uses the term 'symbolic' in the Lacanian sense, that is to say as 'the junction of the body, psyche and language' which determines the way in which dominant discourse, that of the Law of the Father, imposes modes of representation and a phallic order which structure the subject and society.[7]

Enunciation also describes the position of the speaking subject, that is to say of the subject as an *I* who occupies a given place in the order of discourse. The notion of position necessarily implies that of hierarchy. For Irigaray, the decisive factor in the existing system of hierarchy is sexual difference. Western Thought posits the male speaker as a speaking subject in the symbolic, as an *I* who can speak as the guarantor of universality and truth. As such, he has the power to name. To have the power to name presupposes that the speaker can speak for himself, since his position of subject in the symbolic enables him to prescribe his own version of reality through language and to materialize his power through the imposition of a patriarchal society. Thus the male speaking subject is seen as the maker of a discourse of universality which has to be adopted by the female speaker. She is reduced to becoming a mimetic speaker. The male speaking subject can speak for and allocate a place to the female speaker in discourse. This

[7] Reference to Whitford's comments in Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge,1991),p.37.

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means that the female speaker finds herself in a situation of enunciation where she becomes an object of discourse. The female '*I*' cannot speak for herself, as a speaking subject in her own right, as a speaking subject whose specificity can neither be represented or legitimated by the dominant discourse. The binary process, characterising the positioning of the male and female speakers, is reproduced in the social order where the divisions existing in the symbolic justify the inequality of functions and roles allocated to men and women. The meaning and the orientation of discourse, denying female speakers the right to become a subject of enunciation, that is to say, to be actively involved as a co-producer of a language which shapes reality is thus already flawed from the start. "Le concept a deux héros. Mais l'un est réduit à une marque, un masque inapproprié, un vêtement imputé, l'autre est supposé devenir la matière, le sujet, l'englobant absolu".[8]

Enunciation is important because it creates a situation which determines the possibilities, be they symbolically or socially defined, for the speaker to define or to be defined, to act or to be submitted to a reality presented as neutral and universal whilst it is in fact created by a gendered

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[8] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés*(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p. 126. The notion of concept, in this context, can be understood as the dominant discourse, where the male speaker gives content and power to a language expressing reality and truth as a whole whilst the female speaker has to accept and fit in this inadequate representation of the world reducing her to a trace, *marque*, subsumed by the male speech or word, *parole*.

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discourse reflecting an inequality vis à vis the power to name.

> La psychanalyse... Un discours qui dit le vrai de la logique de la vérité: à savoir que le *féminin n'y a lieu qu'à l'intérieur de modèles et de lois édictés par des sujets masculins*. Ce qui implique qu'il n'existe pas réellement deux sexes, mais un seul... Ce modèle, *phallique*, participe des valeurs promues par la société et la culture patriarchales [...].[9]

To enhance Irigaray's reasoning, I will refer to Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence to show the way in which male domination is imposed through a dominant discourse claiming to be neutral and universal. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence consists of the imposition of a specific way of perceiving, understanding and expressing reality. The arbitrariness of this power remains unrecognized as such and therefore becomes a norm accepted by the subject. Following Irigaray's and Bourdieu's analyses, I will argue that the arbitrariness of the discourse imposed by patriarchal power is misrecognized as such, since it claims to be a neutral discourse of universality which is corroborated by Western Thought. Irigaray states that enunciation, as a system of relations defining the structures which determine the subject, language and the world, is a permanent questioning of any form of pre-established discourse.

> C'est que l'énonciation est mise en relation de structures - sujet, code, monde, co-locuteur - et non système de rapports entre unités définies. En tant que

[9] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p. 85. The terms typed in bold are presented as such in the text.

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> telle, elle est contestation permanente de tout discours déjà dit.[10]

This means that the structures imposed by a pre-discursive power pretending to represent reality and truth can be challenged. It also implies that the conditions shaping the production of discourse can be changed if the situation of enunciation empowers the speaking subject, in other words, if the situation of enunciation enables the speaking subject to be recognized as having the power to name.

In this chapter, two examples will illustrate Irigaray's critique of the construction of identity in traditional psychoanalysis and philosophy: firstly the Lacanian theory of male and female subjects, analysed in terms of '*l'avoir et l'être*', 'having' and 'being', secondly, the Hegelian theory of consciousness will be analysed in relation to the different levels of consciousness allocated to the male or female subjects. Finally, it will also be argued that both approaches can be considered to be acts of symbolic violence characterizing the discourse of universality adopted by Western thought.

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[10] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.69.

1. THE FEMALE SUBJECT IN LACANIAN THEORY.

1.1. 'Having' and 'being', *'l'avoir' et 'l'être'*.

For Lacan there is no universal subject but a subject who is constructed, on one hand, through his relationship with the other who is another subject, society or the family. On the other hand, the subject is also constructed through discourse, a term which can also be referred to as the Other. Discourse, in this context, is the dialectical process engaged between historical, as well as social and symbolic factors. Discourse permeates language, the signifying chain marking the entry of the child into the symbolic order, that is to say into the reality of social order guaranteed by paternal authority.[11] A subject, like a signifier in a chain of signifiers, can only exist if he/she is represented and acknowledged as such by another subject. This process is valid for male or female subjects. Therefore, it cannot be said that, in Lacanian theory, the male subject is an entity, representing universality just because of its own existence. However, it can be argued that the symbolic order to which all subjects are submitted, be they male or female, acts as

[11] I use the term reality to express the idea of that which exists, independently of the subject's awareness. I do not use this term in connection with the Lacanian term, The Real, described by Ragland-Sullivan as "a brute, pre-symbolic reality which returns in the form of need... the object of which is the 'satisfaction of Oneness'". Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, 'The Real', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell,1992),pp.374-376 (p.375).

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a discourse of universality based on a patriarchal system denying women the right to have a place of their own in the symbolic and to take an active part in the making of society.

I will argue, in agreement with Irigaray's analysis supported by other feminist critiques of Lacan, that his theory of the symbolic order denies women the possibility of becoming subjects.

Moreover, I will attempt to show that, according to the Lacanian approach, women cannot be or act as subjects of enunciation because they are negated and objectified by the phallic model which underlies the construction of reality, truth and language. The role of the Phallus as the 'Signifier of signifiers', is inseparable from that of the *Logos*, representing word and truth. These two notions, when combined, also expressed as phallogocentrism, constitute a power imposing a predominant model of sexuality, language and subjectivity which excludes and dominates the *feminine*. Phallogocentrism can therefore be analysed as a form of imperialism which is not recognized as such for it is presented as a discourse of universal and neutral value. The equation between phallic power and universality can consequently be interpreted as symbolic violence:

> Le destin dit naturel des deux sexes ne l'est déjà plus. Les lois et les moeurs ont déjà perverti la nature dans la *prétention à l'universel édicté d'un seul côté*. Que l'homme tienne tellement le langage pour intangible, neutre, universel (tombé du ciel?) s'explique aisément: il est géré comme vérité *d'un seul côté*. Et le prestige

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> théorique du *neutre* aujourd'hui est partiellement comique. Il est tragique aussi, et ne va pas sans quelque violence... Car chacun prétend à la neutralité sans percevoir qu'il s'agit d'*un* neutre, de *son* neutre et non d'une neutralité absolue.[12]

The confinement of the feminine to phallic models will be discussed by looking at the way in which Lacan defines the centrality of the phallic economy in the construction of the speaking subject. Three main factors play a decisive part in this formative phase: Firstly, the positing of two modes of 'being', 'having' and 'being', '*l'avoir et l'être*', on which the very notion of subjectivity depends; secondly, the entry of the speaking subject into the symbolic order and language, corresponding to the post-oedipal phase; and finally the role of the speaking subject vis à vis the other and the Other, which define the function of the subject in society.

Irigaray establishes a parallel between the phallic economy and the dominance of 'the Same', '*l'Empire de l'Un*'. 'The Same' is the omnipotent male subject produced by the patriarchal discourse, whose predominance can be explained and justified by the way his identity is equated to that of the Phallus. Irigaray stresses the importance of the links between the Phallus, the Same, presence and power in Lacanian theory, which define the mode of 'having' and 'being', '*l'avoir et l'être*'. For Lacan, the penis is the male sexual

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[12] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987), p.131. All expressions typed in italic are in italic in the original text.

organ whilst the Phallus symbolizes the social and symbolic power attributed to men. The Phallus is not a biological organ but a signifier representing meaning and presence.[13] The Phallus has a symbolic role, not because it is an object which has a specific value in itself, but because it acts as a referent, the ultimate referent which functions as a mode of classification governing the relations between men, women and society. It is a third element in a system of communication materialising exchange and desire. In Lacanian terms, the phallus is the object that both parents are supposed to possess.[14] The mother is thus considered as the phallic mother by the child in its pre-oedipal phase. The phallus is synonymous with presence or possession for the boy child who can identify with his father and with absence and lack for the girl child who does not possess a phallus. It acts as a mediating element and contributes to the

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[13] When the Phallus signifies meaning, the referent without which no other signifier can have a meaning, it is named 'The Signifier of Signifiers' by Lacan all through his work. When it is associated with the concept of the Name-of-the-Father, that is to say, the idea of law and order embodied by the father, it is usually written with a capital -P-.

[14] David Macey explains that the phallus is '[...] initially defined as the mediating element in the castration complex, as an imaginary object which the child comes to accept as being the father's possession (Jacques Lacan,[1955-56]: *Le Séminaire*, book 3, *Les Psychoses* (Paris: Editions du Seuil,1981). It becomes the privileged signifier marking the articulation of the *Logos* with desire'. David Macey, 'Phallus:definitions',in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell,1992),pp.318-320 (p.318).

When the phallus represents the object of exchange and desire, it is usually written with a small -p-.

construction of the subject by way of elimination: those who have the phallus and therefore who have access to power, that is to say the male subjects, and those who are the phallus and are constructed through its meaning but who are not posited as subjects.

For the boy child, the phallus signifies 'having' and presence, for as a possessor of the penis, he can identify with his father.[15] The relationship of the girl with the phallus is very different. She is defined by three sorts of situations: firstly, as she does not possess the penis she is described by Lacan as a lack. Secondly, her entry into the oedipal phase is marked by penis envy, and thirdly, as a woman-to-be she has to become the phallus so that she can satisfy her own desire as well as male desire. In order to receive the phallus to fill her lack, she has to become the object of desire for her male partner. She uses her body as a phallus, that is to say as a signifier of desire, to provoke and satisfy male desire:

> Disons que ces rapports tourneront autour d'un être et d'un avoir qui, de se rapporter à un signifiant, le phallus, ont l'effet contrarié de donner d'une part réalité au sujet dans ce signifiant, d'autre part d'irréaliser les relations à signifier.
>
> Ceci par l'intervention d'un paraître qui se substitue à l'avoir, pour le protéger d'un côté, pour en masquer le manque dans l'autre, et qui a pour effet de projeter entièrement les manifestations idéales ou typiques du comportement de chacun des sexes, jusqu'à la limite de l'acte de la copulation, dans la comédie.
>
> [...] nous disons que c'est pour être le phallus,

[15] This point is discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

> c'est à dire le signifiant du désir de l'Autre, que la femme va rejeter une part essentielle de la féminité,nommément tous ses attributs dans la mascarade. C'est pour ce qu'elle n'est pas qu'elle entend être désirée en même temps qu'aimée.[16]

In this statement, it seems that the subject, whether it is male or female, can only materialize its own reality through his/her relation with the phallus. It also seems that in order to engage in a relationship with the other's desire, the female protagonist must submit herself to a sort of game where she has to be what the male subject will want her to be. In other words, she will have to use strategies of seduction, referred to by Lacan as masquerade, in order to arouse male desire. She has to seem to be what he wants in order to have, that is to say, to have the phallus: "un paraître qui se substitue à l'avoir".[17] To embody and be desired, she has to be that which she is not, she has to be the phallus: "C'est pour ce qu'elle n'est pas qu'elle entend être désirée".[18] Without the phallus, the economy of desire and the self-realisation of the subject cannot take place. According to Lacan, the existence of the male subject also revolves around the phallus.

> Si l'homme trouve en effet à satisfaire sa demande d'amour dans la relation à la femme pour autant que le signifiant du phallus la constitue bien comme donnant dans l'amour ce qu'elle n'a pas, - inversément son propre désir du phallus fera surgir son signifiant dans sa divergence rémanente vers "une autre femme" qui peut signifier ce phallus à divers titres, soit comme vierge

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[16] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil,1966),p.694.

[17] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris: Seuil,1966),p.694.

[18] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris:Seuil,1966),p.695.

soit comme prostituée.[19]

Lacan disregards what women are or would want to be outside the phallic order. Desire and meaning are constituted through their relation to the phallus, be it a mode of 'having' or 'being'. Irigaray underlines the domineering aspect of the male economy of desire and 'being' which subsumes the feminine. She stresses the fact that men, as the representatives of phallic power, are able to impose their authority and discourse on women. The 'Economy of the Same' is thus justified in its act of enforcement of a one-sided version of truth and reality presented as a discourse of neutrality and universality to which all subjects must comply.

> Un sujet *sexué* impose ses impératifs comme universellement valables et seuls susceptibles de définir les formes de la raison, de la pensée, du sens, des échanges en général. Il reconduit encore et toujours à la même logique, à la seule logique: de l'un, du Même. Du Même de l'Un.[20]

'Having and being', '*l'avoir et l'être*', are also linked to the mode of functioning of the Same. They are inscribed in a binary system denying women the possibility of expressing their own specificity. As a critical response to the Lacanian account of desire and presence, Irigaray

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[19] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (Paris:Seuil,1966),p.695.

[20] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.282.

describes the economy of the Same as a scopic economy which she also calls the specular, *le spéculaire*. The philosopher uses this term for two different purposes: on one hand, she deconstructs the Lacanian version of the specular and on the other hand, she re-reads the specular from a feminist perspective. Firstly, she refers back to the idea of the child's reflection in the mirror as presented by the Lacanian theory of the imaginary. For Lacan, presence is, in the pre-oedipal phase, that which can be seen in the mirror. The boy child can see the reflection of his penis in the mirror. Its image can be distinctively seen. It is '*spécularisable*'. The sexual organs, '*le sexe*', of the girl child, on the other hand, correspond to what Lacan calls 'the hole' or 'nothing to see', '*le trou,le rien à voir*'.[21] Its mirror image is not as visible as that of the boy child. Therefore, Lacan concludes that the female sex has no specific representation. Irigaray denounces the importance given to the function of the gaze in the Lacanian approach. She considers it to be a way of privileging the phallic economy and a way of excluding women from representation.[22] She considers the Lacanian interpretation to be a negation of the female sexual organ and translates this idea as follows:

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[21] Expressions used by Lacan all through his work. Irigaray critically analyses this expression, '*l'horreur du rien à voir*', in *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977),p.25.

[22] 'Défaut dans cette systématique de la représentation du désir. "Trou" dans son objectif scoptophilique'. *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.26.

woman has no sex, her sex is not one; it cannot be named, it cannot have a proper name:

> Elle résiste à toute définition adéquate. Elle n'a d'ailleurs pas de nom "propre". Et son sexe, qui n'est pas *un* sexe, est compté comme *pas* de sexe. Négatif, envers, revers, du seul sexe visible et morphologiquement désignable... le pénis.[23]

Symbolically, the reflection of the male organ in the mirror is linked to the notion of visibility and thus of presence. What is present can be named and can act as a criteria of existence. By comparison with this model, the girl child can only be associated with the idea of non-existence, with the lack, the hole or the inversion of the male sexual organ. In Lacanian terms, the girl is either incomplete, '*pas toute*', or 'not one', '*pas un*'. Or, as mentioned by Irigaray, she can be the indispensable complement required by the only sex, that is to say, by men.[24]

Therefore, woman's image remains outside the model projected by the Same, outside his presence. Her specificity cannot be '*spécularisable*'. Woman is condemned to remain outside her own existence, '*eks-istance*' in Irigarian terms

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[23] *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.26.

[24] *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.28.

She is '*hors de soi*'.[25] She is an 'absence'.

Irigaray argues against the Lacanian notion of absence by offering a feminist version of the specular. She proposes a different way of looking at the female sexual organs. Instead of using a flat mirror as the only way of reflecting one's image which can only reflect the image of the male subject, she claims that the speculum, as a curved mirror, enables women to see and become aware of their own specificity. The choice of the term speculum does not only refer to a gynaecological instrument or a way of reversing the specular model imposed by men. Irigaray also uses this term as a metaphor to express the idea that there can be another way of looking at the world. She explains the meaning of Speculum as follows: "Il signifie miroir du monde non tant comme reflet du monde grâce à un miroir mais plutôt comme pensée de la réalité ou de l'objectivité du monde à

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[25] '*Ek-sistance*' means that women are condemned to remain outside their own existence because they are not represented in the symbolic as subjects: "La femme est encore le lieu, le tout du lieu où elle ne peut s'approprier comme telle". Luce Irigaray, *Speculum* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1974),p.282. In Lacanian theory, the female subject cannot exist in itself. "Ek-sistant par rapport à toute forme (de) sujet, il n'existerait pas en lui-même". Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.98.

Margaret Whitford explains that '*ek-sistance*' is also synonymous with immanence on the female side and transcendance on the male side. Luce Irigaray, 'The Limits of the Transference', trans. by Margaret Whitford and David Macey, in *The Irigaray Reader: Luce Irigaray*, ed. by Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell,1991),pp.105-117 (pp.116-117).

travers un discours".[26] This means that the reflection of the subject does not have to function according to the model of the Same which sets itself as the only model of reality and existence. She argues that the possibilities of self-representation have to express the specific reality of the subject, be it male or female, or else, the process of self-representation amounts to the reproduction of a one and only model which is never exactly equivalent or equal to the original.

> En effet, si l'autre n'est pas défini dans sa réalité effective, il n'est qu'un autre moi, pas un réel autrui; il peut alors être *plus* ou *moins* que moi, il peut avoir *moins* ou *plus* que moi. Ainsi il peut représenter la/ma grandeur ou perfection absolues, l'Autre: Dieu, Maître, Logos.[27]

By using the speculum as a different way of reflecting and presenting the reality of female specificity, Irigaray attempts to move away from the hierarchical system of identification imposed by the phallic economy. The speculum is not an instrument the purpose of which is to establish universal norms of existence imposed by a discourse of mastery; it is used to present another facet of reality, to transgress the male order of representation. Grosz interprets the speculum in the following way:

> [Irigaray's] critique of psychoanalysis and phallocentrism more generally involves an attempt to

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[26] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi: Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),p.102.

[27] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi: Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris: Grasset,1992),p.104.

> turn the mirror back on itself, to demonstrate the sexual specificity (the masculinity) of the self-reflecting subject. In other words, she conceives her project as a shattering of the order of self-representation, traversing the mirror surface so that women may move beyond their positions as men's others.[28]

The term specul(aris)ation also contains the word speculation which is an integral part of it. When Irigaray associates the two terms, her aim is to denounce the way in which the phallic economy, for instance in Lacan's discourse, assumes the right to speculate on the modes of construction of identity and on the relationship of men and women with the world. By defining woman as '*l'afemme*', Lacan implies that woman does not exist in herself, that is to say as a subject, as the 'One', '*l'Un*'. This postulate denies woman the possibility of constructing images of herself in the imaginary, of expressing her difference in language and of naming reality.[29] Therefore woman is submitted to the phallic order which either appropriates her as the reflection of the male subject's self-image or rejects her as a non-existent subject in the symbolic. "[...] dans son absence d'imaginaire, elle ne sait comment articuler sa différence. Se laissant donc consommer encore pour de nouvelles

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[28] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists* (Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p.xxii.

[29] These two remarks are discussed in detail in the next two sections of this chapter.

spéculations,ou rejeter comme impropre à la consommation".[30]

In the mirror, there is only room for one image of reality and one way to model and name reality: the discourse of the Same. The male subject, the One, acts as a universal quantifier, *'un quantificateur universel'*, who establishes, appropriates or rejects the criteria on which the subject is constructed according to the rules dictated by the phallic order.[31] "Pas de 'sujet', à moins d'être transformée par le phallocratisme".[32] Irigaray argues that the image projected by the male speculative project is totally arbitrary and acts as a form of imperialism erasing one aspect of reality, the feminine, which ends up by being reduced to a position of submission or negation. "Car l'image est un signifiant trompeur. Elle se donne d'emblée comme un discours global, fini".[33]

In this section 'having' and 'being', *'l'avoir et l'être'*, have been analysed in relation to the Phallus which represents a form of power. The possession of the phallus,

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[30] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1974)pp.282-283.

[31] *Quantificateur universal* is an expression which is used by Irigaray in *La Mécanique des fluides*, in Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.106.

[32] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.109.

[33] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.26.

as a sexual organ reflected in the mirror, acts as a form of symbolic title deed enabling men to be posited as subjects in the symbolic. Women are not in a position to hold or to share this power for their sexual organ does not have a specific image which can be reflected in the mirror, that is to say, '*spécularisable*'. They are therefore excluded from the order of representation in which the male image is set as the only criterion of existence. 'Having', '*l'avoir*', is thus analysed in terms of possession, a notion referred to by Irigaray as property, '*propriété*', and lack, which is a lack of presence and existence in the specular economy characterizing the phallic order. Following Irigaray's argument stating that the specular economy is a form of speculation engineered by patriarchal discourse in order to create a discourse of universality, I have shown that the Phallus can be interpreted as a power of representation and an order of existence through ownership,'*l'avoir*', dictating the mode of 'being', '*l'être*'. I will argue, in the second part of this chapter, that the Phallus can also be interpreted as another form of possession expressed through desire.

Desire and male power can be explained by looking at the role of the symbolic order which guarantees the 'Reign of the One' and enables the Law of the Father to shape the subject in a disguised way.

1.2. The speaking subject and the symbolic order

Desire will be discussed, here, in relation to the oedipal phase. For Lacan, the oedipal phase is the time when the child must find its masculine or feminine identity in order to enter the symbolic order. It is the moment when the child positions itself vis à vis the paternal metaphor, that of the Name-of-the- Father, and therefore can start speaking as an I, that is to say as a speaking subject. The Name-of-the-Father, in Lacanian theory, corresponds to an order of power which is acquired during the Oedipal phase through a process of recognition of the Father as the only representative of authority in the symbolic. The speaking subject can only be a subject if he/she submits to this authority:

> The paternal metaphor diagrams the child's entry into the symbolic order and the social world... The paternal metaphor names the child and thus positions it so that it can be replaced discursively by the 'I', in order to enter language as a speaking being... Like all metaphors, the paternal metaphor is able to generate new meanings, but in this case, it generates the signification of the subject itself. As a consequence of its operation, the child can represent itself as 'I'.[34]

The decisive element of the Oedipal phase is the child's renunciation of his attachment to his mother and the substitution of this link by the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father. As shown previously, the ego is constituted

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[34] ELizabeth Grosz, *Jaques Lacan, A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990),p.104.

during the pre-oedipal mirror stage. By seeing its own reflection in the mirror, the child realizes it can differentiate itself from its mother and the world surrounding it. The child now perceives itself as an independent and unified being whereas, before, it experienced its body-image, therefore, itself as fragmented: "Cette expérience primordiale est au fondement du caractère imaginaire du moi constitué d'emblée comme 'moi idéal' et 'souche des identifications secondaires'.[35] Instead of identifying with its mother, the child now identifies with other human beings. Its ego then depends on other egos, other beings with whom the child tends to confuse itself. The subject is thus constituted through an alienation process. "The self is modelled on an other. The self is thus inherently intersubjective, a paranoid and alienated construct: The ego is always an other, always split between an illusory stability and a unity and recognition of its (potential) autonomy."[36] The quest for a sense of unity characterizing the self is therefore never satisfied. The presence of the mother which was perceived, in the imaginary, during the pre-Oedipal stage, as a reassuring and powerful form of totality is now non-existent. The child is divided between a false sense of security provided by his mirror

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[35] L. Laplanche & J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse*(Paris:P.U.F.,1967),p.452.

[36] Elizabeth Grosz,'The Subject',in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*,ed. by Elizabeth Wright,(Oxford:Blackwell,1992),p.413.

-image and the image of himself reflected by others. In order to compensate for his feeling of instability, the child must find a referent which can give it back some sense of permanence. This is achieved by the resolution of the oedipal complex marking the entry of the child in the symbolic which, at this stage, corresponds to social order and law. The child must leave the realm of the imaginary and renounce his attachment to his mother.

In Lacanian theory, the castration complex indicates the beginning of the construction of the child's identity and is explained in terms of differences, loss and desire. The child has to come to terms with the fact that it has to separate from the phallic mother, that is to say, the mother who hitherto represented wholeness, who could provide inexhaustible love and care as well as give the child a sense of security based on the child's belief that the good mother also held phallic power. During the castration phase, the child must therefore renounce the maternal body as the locus of pleasure and stability in order to acknowledge the primacy of the phallus.

> Et c'est *dans la mère* que la castration doit être, avant tout, repérée, par l'enfant pour qu'il sorte de l'ombre, imaginaire, du désir maternel et qu'il soit renvoyé au père comme à celui qui détient l'emblème phallique pour lequel la mère le désire et le préfère à l'enfant.
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> Ainsi devient possible le fonctionnement de l'ordre symbolique dont le père se doit d'être le garant.[37]

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[37] L. Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),pp.57-58.

In the Lacanian approach, the castration complex consists of two decisive stages: the moment when the child associates the mother with the notion of lack, the lack of the penis and the moment when the phallic mother is no longer perceived as a powerful mother who could act as a referent for the child's identity. After the resolution of the Oedipal complex, the ultimate signifier the child has to refer to is the phallus, signifier of social order, presence and desire. The maternal body is no longer associated with the idea of wholeness and security. It is defined in terms of absence or presence, that of the phallus.[38] The boy child identifies with the father and enters the mode of '*having*' whilst the girl child identifies with the castrated mother and enters the mode of '*being*'.

> Let us say that these relations will turn around a 'to be' and 'to have', which, by referring to a signifier, the phallus, have the opposed effect, on the one hand, of giving reality to the subject in this signifier, and, on the other hand, of derealizing the relations to be signified.[39]

The boy child resolves his castration complex by submitting to the Oedipal father whose presence is castrating as it prevents the boy from forming a sexual attachment to his mother. Irigaray describes the situation as follows:

> [...] le père... il interdira et à la mère et à l'enfant

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[38] "[The Father's] name and law supplant the blood and matter of the mother's connection to the child". Elizabeth Grosz, *J. Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990),p.69.

[39] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London:Tavistock,1977),p.289, in Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990),p.131.

> que leur désir soit comblé, soit que la mère identifie l'enfant au phallus qui lui manque, soit que l'enfant soit assuré d'être le porteur du phallus en satisfaisant, incestueusement, le désir de sa mère.[40]

However, the boy child can still identify with the father who embodies power, a power that the boy knows he will share later as he also possesses the phallus. The unconscious of the boy child is constituted through repression which is the repression of his incestuous feelings for the mother and through his acceptance of the Law of the Father.

The situation is very different for the girl child who must either identify with the castrated mother, that is to say with the mother who does not have a penis or who can no longer represent power and be regarded as an object of love and desire when the post-oedipal stage is reached. The girl child has no alternative but to turn to the father and submit to his Law as the boy child does. She must acquire the feminine elements characterizing the mother in order to compensate for her lack, the lack of the phallus and to become an object of desire for the male other. According to Lacan, no object of desire can exist on its own. It is the desire of the other which brings it to existence. Thus the phallus only exists because it is desired by the female other. Grosz explains that this process works in the same way as regards the woman's body which can only exist if it desired by the male other. In order to satisfy this

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[40] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.58.

condition the girl, and later the woman, have to enter the mode of masquerade. Grosz also explains that this is the only way for the woman to secure her access to the phallic.[41] To enter the symbolic order the girl child has to submit to the Law of the Father by either abandoning the mother as a love object and replacing this attachment by forming a desire for the phallus or by becoming an object of desire for the phallus.[42] In both cases the resolution of her oedipal phase is dependent on the phallic. The unconscious of the girl child is also constituted by going through a process of repression for she must detach herself from the mother as the boy child does. Moreover, she must model her identity according to the Father's desire and submit to his Law, knowing that she will never be in a position to share his power because of her lack.

> Divisée en deux par l'Oedipe (désormais située entre deux hommes, le père et l'amant), elle serait exilée dans le monde masculin, paternel. Errante, mendiante par rapport à des valeurs qu'elle ne pourrait pas s'approprier.[43]

In order to have access to language and to become a speaking subject, the boy child as well as the girl child both have to conform to the order, law and desire represented by the Name-of-the-Father: "It is the *Name-of-the-Father* that we must

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[41] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan, A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990),p.132.

[42] The Law of the Father, in Lacanian terms, is the law implemented through the patriarchal discourse.

[43] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.293-294.

recognise as the support of the symbolic function, which, from the dawn of history has identified his person with the figure of the law".[44]

The child enters the symbolic order when it enters language.[45] This means that the child has to accept the norms transmitted through the Law of the Father which are materialized by language. The child has to become integrated into what Irigaray calls the Empire of the One, *'l'Empire de l'Un'*, and to conform to its codes and practices. The child's position as a speaking subject is already determined by the nature of its relationship with the Phallus. The Law of the Father posits the boy child as a subject in the symbolic. The girl child, as long as she also accepts the Law of the Father can be said to have the status of subject in the symbolic. But that status does not enable her to be or speak in her own right. As a castrated subject who cannot overcome her castration as she does not possess the phallus, or cannot model herself on the mother who also suffers from this lack, she cannot have access to the situation of power the boy enjoys. Her position is first and foremost a position of submission dictated by the power of the Name-of-the Father. Consequently, the conditions allowing the girl

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[44] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* (London:Tavistock,1977)p.67, in Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990),p.71.

[45] The definition and role of the symbolic order are analysed on pp.32-33.

child to be posited as an 'I', that is to say, as a speaking subject, are distorted from the moment she enters the symbolic order. She can never speak for herself, as herself. She has to adopt the language of the Father in order to communicate and to be accepted. Grosz explains that what happens to the girl is not as clear as what happens to the boy:

> In one sense, in so far as she speaks and says 'I', she too must take up a place as a subject of the symbolic; yet, in another, in so far as she is positioned as castrated, passive, an object of desire for men rather than a subject who desires, her position within the symbolic must be marginal or tenuous: when she speaks as an 'I' it is never clear that she speaks (of or as) herself.[46]

Like the boy child she is made by the dominant discourse, but unlike him, her specificity as a female subject is not represented in this discourse. He has the power to name and she is excluded from it.

After the resolution of the Oedipal complex, one model of identity is imposed based on the primacy of the phallus. In the same way, one model of language is also imposed, based on the primacy of one meaning and one signifier, that is to say on the Signifier of signifiers, the Phallus which represents unity and power. It is as if the binary system which underlined the initial phase in the construction of the subject was transcended by the power of its own discourse. The system of division established by the binary opposition

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[46] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan, A feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990),pp.71-72.

between 'having' and 'being', presence and absence, the-Name-of-the-Father and the phallic mother seems to be subsumed by the imposition of one discourse which generates identity, and a code of practice. In Irigarian terms, this discourse corresponds to the language of the Same.

> Un sujet *sexué*, impose ses impératifs comme universellement valables et seuls susceptibles de définir les formes de la raison, de la pensée, du sens, des échanges en général... L'Empire de l'Un, du même de l'Un, ...s'étaye sur un *binarisme* jamais *radicalement* remis en cause... Oui/non, dedans/dehors, bon/mauvais, vrai/faux, être/non-être,... demeurent les opposés à partir desquels le sujet assure son entrée dans le langage non sans qu'ils s'y trouvent pliés, par la langue, *au principe de non-contradiction*: oui *ou* non, pas oui et non en même temps, du moins en apparence... Alternatives dès lors mesurées, tempérées, temporalisées et déterminées sur le mode la hiérarchie: la contradiction étant toujours supposée pouvoir être résolue dans un *bon* terme, selon une *bonne* finalité.[47]

The entry of the child into language is therefore determined firstly by its position as a speaking subject in the symbolic, and, secondly, by the way the child obeys the rules dictated by the Law of the Father. In both cases, its conditions of existence are linked to its relationship to the phallus, which acts either as a referent without which self-representation is impossible or as a symbol of male desire and unitary meaning.

The structures of language are thus enclosed in a fixed order, that of the symbolic order. Unlike the imaginary

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[47] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.282-286.

marked by the symbiotic relationship between mother and child, the symbolic order is characterized by the Law of the Father. The subject has to inscribe himself/herself in the symbolic order to be represented as an 'I', as a speaking subject, and to become a social being. The symbolic order also shapes the unconscious since the imaginary has to be repressed for the child to enter the symbolic order.[48]

According to Irigaray, the symbolic order corresponds to the gendered discourse, '*discours sexué*', which precedes the construction of subjectivity.

> Et pourtant, ...déjà, le "sujet" est spécifié, marqué par un discours antérieur - de l'autre, du monde.... ...le "sujet" ... est situé dans un système de relations contraignantes pour la réalisation de son discours.[49]

Thus, the symbolic order is the order of the Other, interpreted here as a symbolic syntax which produces the subject. Bons-Grafé explains that the symbolic syntax is engendered by the structure of language which constitutes the

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[48] The symbolic order is analysed with reference to Elizabeth Grosz's and Margaret Whitford's studies of the symbolic in the Lacanian theory as well as in the Irigarian critique. Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists* (Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989)p.xxiii & Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the feminine* (London:Routledge,1991)p.90.

[49] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.70.
The reason why Irigaray chooses to put the word subject in between quotation marks: "the subject", is to emphasize the importance of the dominant discourse in the construction of subjectivity. ' ...un sujet -je- traversé initialement par le monde et le langage.' Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.15.

unconscious and governs the speaking subject unbeknown to him/her.

> Unaware of the extent to which his speech is spoken from the Other scene of the signifying chain, the subject, then, is split between what he *says* and what *is said*, a split that Lacan formulates as the split between the subject of the utterance and the subject of the statement.[50]

This interpretation seems to illustrate perfectly well Irigaray's position in this domain. If one accepts that there is a gap between the statement, the '*énoncé*', produced by the speaking subject and what the subject is really saying, it means that the situation of enunciation in which the speaker is placed determines his/her statement as well as the way he/she formulates it. Unaware of the factors governing his/her production of language, that is to say, of the conditions of production imposed by the symbolic order, the speaker is structured by what Irigaray calls the anterior discourse, '*le discours antérieur*'. Moreover, and still in agreement with the Irigarian perspective, a distinction is established between the speakers depending on the position they occupy in the symbolic. The male discourse corroborates the discourse of the Other, but the male speaking subject is not aware of it. His interest is not to question a situation which unconditionally empowers him as a subject of enunciation. "A part les biens au sens strict que l'homme

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[50] Marie-Claire Boons-Grafé, 'Other/other', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, ed. by Elizabeth Wright (Oxford: Blackwell,1992)pp.296-299,(p.298).

s'attribue, il donne son genre à Dieu, au soleil, mais aussi sous le masque du neutre, aux lois du cosmos et de l'ordre social ou individuel. Il ne se pose même pas la question de la généalogie de cette attribution".[51] Women are either constructed by the male discourse or subsumed by that of the Other. The female speaker is unable to materialize her specificity through a language which is not already a form of negation of her capacity to impose herself as a subject of enunciation; the female speaker ends up by being a pale copy of the male speaker. "La femme est encore le lieu, le tout du lieu où elle ne peut s'approprier comme telle".[52] "En effet, si l'autre n'est pas défini dans sa réalité effective, il n'est qu'un autre moi, pas un réel autrui".[53]

The dominance of the Phallus is imposed as an act of ownership materialized by 'having', '*l'avoir*'. Its power as the ultimate Signifier is reinforced by a social order based on patriarchal authority. The Name-of-the-Father constructs a sense of reality or symbolic order which shapes men's and women's destiny. There is no room for sexual difference in such a future, '*devenir*', in Irigarian terms. "Le corps patriarchal se bâtit hiérarchiquement en excluant la

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[51] Luce Irigaray, *Je,tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris: Grasset,1990),p.38.

[52] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum: de l'Autre Femme* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1974),p.282.

[53] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris: Grasset,1992)p.104.

différence".[54] The phallic economy is organized around male desire and the language structures are articulated in relation to this desire to convey a sense of order where the role of each sex is pre-defined by their conditions of entry into the symbolic order and therefore language. Because the female speaker is not able to posit herself and to act as an 'I', her impact on the construction of reality is insignificant. She cannot act as a knower if she cannot be recognized as a subject of enunciation in the first place. The place of the female speaker in enunciation is condemned to remain an absence or a mode of 'being' equivalent to submission, mimesis or inversion if one accepts the following Lacanian postulate: firstly the Phallus is synonymous with existence and presence since it is a mode of 'having' based on its power of representation, in other words, a mode of specula(risa)tion; secondly, the Phallus is the only way of expressing desire and meaning, the purpose of which is to fill a lack either through sexual relations or through language. Irigaray argues that the negation of the female speaking subject as a subject of enunciation can be opposed by challenging the way the symbolic order enforces its social and symbolic domination through an apparently neutral discourse of universality.

> [...] on pourrait soupçonner le *phallus* (le Phallus) d'être l'*actuelle figure d'un dieu jaloux de ses prérogatives*, de prétendre, à ce titre, être le sens dernier de tout discours, l'étalon de la vérité et de la

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[54] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)p.55.

> propriété, notamment du sexe, le signifiant et/ou le signifié ultime de tout désir, outre que, emblème et agent du système patriarcal, il continuerait à couvrir le crédit du nom du père (du Père).[55]

She proposes to establish a different status of subjectivity by making sexual difference recognized and legitimate.

> Pour obtenir un statut subjectif équivalent à celui des hommes, les femmes doivent donc faire reconnaître leur différence. Elles doivent s'affirmer comme sujets valables, filles de mère et de père, respectueuses de l'autre en elles et exigeant de la société le même respect. Mais tout le cadre de leur identité est à construire ou reconstruire.[56]

One way of reconstructing the female identity Irigaray talks about is to change female discourse and to speak as a Woman.[57]

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[55] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.63.

[56] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris: Grasset,1990),p.57.

[57] This will be discussed in the second chapter.

2. THE FEMALE SUBJECT IN HEGELIAN PHILOSOPHY.

The second part of this chapter will look at the place and role assigned to the female speaking subject in philosophical discourse. Irigaray often refers to Hegel in her work. She either directly discusses Hegelian theories such as those on the family in *L'universel comme médiation*, or she interprets and expands the Hegelian concepts of love and the 'negative', as it is the case in *J'Aime à Toi*, where she responds to the Hegelian approach by developing her own theory of intersubjectivity between men and women.[58]

In this section, I have chosen not to analyse the role of the female speaking subject in relation to Hegel's Master/Slave theory, as detailed studies in this domain have already been carried out.[59] Rather, I will attempt to show that the place assigned to the female speaking subject in the Hegelian approach is all the more limited as it is confined to the realm of the family. I will use Irigaray's analysis as well as other feminist critiques of Hegel's work to show that the female subject cannot have access to the same level of consciousness and experience as those characterizing the male subject. I will therefore argue that the female speaker cannot be posited and act as a subject of enunciation within a Hegelian framework.

2.1. Hegel and the family.

Hegel held that the family is the sphere of the woman, and that women should be excluded from activities

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[58] 'L'universel comme médiation', in Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés*(Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.141.

[59] See appendix 1 for a detailed list of feminist studies referring to Hegel's Master/Slave theory.

associated with civil society and the state.[60]
The role of the female speaking subject will be analysed in relation to the family, civil society and the state. Following Irigaray's approach, I will suggest that these three institutions structure the situation of enunciation in which the female speaker is placed.

Hegel describes the family as an immediate unity which, together with civil society constitute the state.[61] Firstly, the family is a nucleus designed to establish links of love between its members and provide them with a sense of security which enables them to develop as individuals.[62] This first stage in the constitution of the family is marked by marriage: "Marriage, the form assumed by the concept of the family in its immediate phase".[63] The second stage, is the legalisation of the family as an institution: "a legal

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[60] Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell,1992),p.136.

[61] The expression 'immediate unity' sums up Hegel's definition found in Hegel,*Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1967),sec.158, p.110. This expression is used by R.C.Solomon, in *In the Spirit of Hegel*, p. 539.

[62] Hence in a family, one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),sec. 158, p.110.

[63] Hegel,*Philosophy of Right*, trans by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),secs. 160 & 171, p.116.

entity... represented by the husband as its head".[64] To secure this position, the notion of property is introduced. Hegel describes this phase as that of: "Family property and Capital (the external embodiment of the concept) and attention to these".[65] The final stage, named by Hegel 'the education of children and the dissolution of the Family', is the moment where the family is subsumed by civil society. The family unity is dissolved when children leave to create their own family. This phase also corresponds to an ethical moment which is part of an overall evolutionary process starting from the moment of natural immediacy to arrive at the moment of ethical Ideal. This is what Hegel calls the stage of difference, when civil society replaces the family unit, the moment when children become autonomous and complete persons.

> The family disintegrates... into a plurality of families, each of which conducts itself as in principle as self-subsistent concrete person and therefore as externally related to its neighbours. In other words, the moments bound together in the unity of the family, since the family is the ethical Idea still in its concept, must be released from the concept to self-subsistent objective reality. This is the stage of difference.[66]

Knox specifies that "The transition from family to civil society corresponds on a higher level to that from right to

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[64] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),secs. 160 & 171, p.116.

[65] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),secs. 160 & 171, p.116.

[66] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),sec.181, p.122.

morality".[67]

The Hegelian family is therefore based on the links between love, marriage, children, and property, placed under the authority of the father and legitimated by the institutions which guarantee their validity and right. The concepts on which the idea and the functioning of the family depend can be said to be universal laws, that is to say, firstly, legal and economic principles applying to men and women alike as well as to all types of society and secondly, codes of conduct presuming that each individual will be able to overcome his or her own interest in order to work for the good of civil society. However, as it will be shown in the next section of this discussion, these universal laws do not constitute equal rights for male or female individuals. The notion of universality characterizing these laws is not as neutral as it seems to be.

Women are defined according to three categories corresponding to the roles they play in the family: they are either sisters, mothers, wives or daughters. Sisters have a relatively equal relationship with their brothers because their association is devoid of desire: "[...] the moment of the individual self, recognizing and being recognized, can here assert its right, because it is linked to the

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[67] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967), sec. 181, p. 353.

equilibrium of the blood".[68] The fact that Hegel based his analysis of the relationship between brothers and sisters on Antigone gives it an idealist turn. It also stresses the division he establishes between mind and body. The brother/sister relationship is a moral one because it is not connected to any biological or sexual link between men and women. According to Hegel female morality is mainly dependent on women's biological life and the only possibility of overcoming this limitation can be found in the ethical union of sisters and brothers where brothers are loved and revered: "The loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest".[69]

This view forms a sharp contrast with his view on women as mothers and wives. Through wifehood women obtain recognition and dignity whilst motherhood is seen as a vocation and a duty dictated by the ethical life pertaining to the family: "Woman ...has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical

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[68] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),sec.457, p.275.

[69] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),sec.457, p. 275. This point has also been underlined by M. O'Brien in *The Dialectics of Reproduction* (London:Routledge & Kegan Paul,1981),p.26: 'It is because female morality is essentially biological that Hegel sees the perfect moral male/female relationship as that of brother and sister, and Antigone appears in his work as history's only heroine'.

frame of mind".[70] This statement seems to be even more relevant to the role of women as daughters whose function is to respect and obey their parents, to keep their memory alive and to obliterate all traces of emotion when they die so that daughters can become mothers:

> As a daughter, the woman must now see her parents pass away with a natural emotion and ethical resignation, for it is only at the cost of this relationship that she can achieve that existence of her own of which she is capable.[71]

In the Hegelian system the whole existence of women is determined by the fact they appertain to the family. They have no independent existence since they cannot escape the determinate features imposed on them by the family structures. Their roles as daughters, mothers or wives define the nature of their self-identity.

Women's lives are governed by duties and not rights that are doubly negated: firstly women do not have access to civil society as citizens and, secondly, female consciousness is constituted through a third party represented by the male speaking subject who acts as their spokesman within civil society and the state.

Women play a very limited part in civil society. They

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[70] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),sec.166, p.114.

[71] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V.Miller (Oxford: Oxford:Oxford University Press,1977),sec.457, p.274.

have human rights but no civic or citizens rights.[72] Their contribution to civil society or to the state stems from their roles as guardians of the ethical life in the family. The family unit prepares each individual for the duties which are assigned to him or her according to his or her sex. Thus the role of women is to prepare the members of the family for the roles and tasks society means them to have. The family represents the initial phase in the shaping of citizens by the bourgeois state:

> The family is considered as the first, immediate phase of ethical life, which sublates raw, sensual urges into the institution of marriage and prepares the individual for participation in civil society and the state. The family is the sphere of woman, who "has her substantive destiny in the family, and to be imbued with family piety is her ethical frame of mind".[73]

As the family corresponds to the immediate phase of the individual's development, be it social or ethical, female consciousness is reduced to the immediate stage of consciousness. Female consciousness is restricted to the nature, function and ethical life of the family unit; it does not enable women to recognize or posit themselves as subjects who have the right to speak in their own right. Women are condemned to remain in 'the nether world', which,

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[72] This statement is extracted from Michael Inwood's explanations on the role of the family and women in Hegelian theory. Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford:Blackwell,1992),p.98.

[73] Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell,1992),p.99, with reference to *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. by T.M.Knox (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1967),sec.158-181,pp.350-353.

according to Hegel, corresponds to the darkness of an insubstantial inner world equated with the primitive stage of the family, by comparison with civil society which represents the opening of the outer world and its constant evolution. It is as if women were fixed in a state of consciousness which can never enable their self to be exteriorized as an autonomous self because they are confined to a less advanced stage of awareness and experience. This restriction prevents women from being recognized as subjects. Irigaray interprets the 'nether world' as *'le plus souterrain'*, or, *'le côté de l'obscur'*.[74] Some other feminist critics of Hegel have also interpreted the 'nether world' in the same way.[75] The female speaker, in the Hegelian system, only has the rights and status allocated by the family structure. She cannot engage in purposive activity, that is to say, in the understanding or making of the discourse which rules civil society or the state. Women have no part to play outside the 'nether world'. The law of civil society guaranteed by the state dictates the rules they must abide by. If they refuse to do so, chaos or death result as shown in *Antigone*. The authority of the ruler cannot be transgressed or even

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[74] Luce Irigaray, *Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle*, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1984),pp.144-115.

[75] Jean Bethke Elshtain, in 'Politics and social Transformation', *Public Man, Private Woman* (Oxford:Martin Robertson and Princeton University Press,1981). Diana Coole, in *Women in Political Theory*, Hemel Hempstead,Harvester Wheatsheaf,1988),p. 182, and Genevieve Lloyd, in 'Hegel, The feminine nether world'in *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London:Methuen,1984).

challenged.

> Hegel associates women with feelings, affection and instinct, rather than reason or understanding, and thus regards their place as the home, rearing and educating children.[76]

According to Hegel, women are subjects and have civic rights, but they can only reach a secondary level of consciousness and only enjoy limited rights as citizens because they are not in a position where they can establish themselves and make themselves heard in the outer world of civil society.

2.2. Irigaray's critique of Hegel's theory of the family.

> Comment donc, pour Hegel, s'organisent les relations entre la femme et l'homme dans la famille? La femme y est épouse et mère. Mais cette fonction, pour elle, correspond à un devoir abstrait. Elle n'est donc pas cette femme-ci, irréductible dans sa singularité, épouse de cet homme-ci, lui-même irréductible, et elle n'est pas davantage cette femme-ci, mère de cet ou ces enfant(s)-ci. Cette singularité ne lui est laissée que du point de vue de l'homme pour qui elle reste liée à l'immédiateté naturelle. Pour elle, il s'agit d'être épouse et mère en tant que ces fonctions représentent une tâche vis-à-vis de l'universel dont elle s'acquitte en renonçant à ses désirs singuliers.[77]

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[76] M. Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford:Blackwell,1992), p98.

[77] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris: Grasset,1992),pp.42-43. Although there is no direct reference to any specific sections of Hegel's work in this passage of Irigaray's book, her statement would appear to be directly related to the section 457 in Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V.Miller, (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1977),p.274.

Irigaray also explains that, according to Hegel, love is a form of universal work for women who must not love their husband or children for themselves but for what they represent: "Elle doit aimer l'homme et l'enfant comme génériques de l'espèce humaine dominée par le genre masculin".[78] In other words, women have to submit to the family ethical life as it is imposed by the patriarchal discourse. Their own feelings and desire are negated by the obligation to fulfill the roles society demands of them. The type of household Hegel describes does not allow women to express their specificity as subjects or to develop relationships in their own way. The Hegelian family does not give women the opportunity of developing female self-awareness either. It can be seen as a way of confining women to the boundaries of duties and to a restricted level of consciousness and experience which is then used to justify their inability to have access to the power represented by the outer world of society and the state.

> [...] the feminine, in the form of the sister, does not attain to *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness, but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world. The woman is associated with these household gods [Penates] and beholds in them both her universal substance and her particular individuality".[79]

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[78] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris: Grasset, 1992),p.44.

[79] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V.Miller (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1977),sec. 457,p.274.

According to Hegel, women have access to the universal through being active and productive in private spheres where their object of consciousness is restricted to nature, nurturing and the family ethical life. But their understanding and experience of universality stops there. Hegel does not appear to think that women are capable of differientating themselves from their roles as daughters, mothers or wives. These three functions fix women in immediacy. All their capacities, functions and interests are condemned to be "exempt from an existence in the real world". Irigaray assesses the situation as follows:

> L'homme se veut seul citoyen à part entière... La femme, elle, est soumise à un destin imposé par son père, ses frères, son mari, le "roi", le droit civil conçu par le peuple des hommes, l'Etat. Elle doit demeurer invisible en tant que femme dans la société, fidèle à un destin naturel immédiat de reproductrice du corps, des corps, destin dont elle est capable mais qui ne constitue pas, comme obligation, une spiritualisation de sa nature.[80]

It can therefore be said that women are trapped by the family unit which prevents them from acting as an autonomous 'I', that is to say, as a subject who can develop self-consciousness and have the power to name. Lloyd's analysis of the relationship between women and the family corroborates that of Irigaray in this domain.

> Hegel equates female consciousness with the life of the Family, a primitive stage in relation to the more self-conscious life of Civil Society... The Family represents the unconscious notion of the ethical, as opposed to its self-conscious existence embodied in the wider life of

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[80] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.151.

> Society, where the ethical 'shapes and maintains itself by working for the universal'.[81]

The universal Hegel refers to as regards women is in fact a very limited horizon the limits of which correspond to men's needs, desire and authority. In the Hegelian approach the 'I' is supposed to be universal because everyone is an 'I' and "everyone is the 'receptacle' for all one's conceptions".[82] However, in the case of women, universal values such as family ethical life are a means of excluding them from a higher level of universality where reason and rationality are the prerogatives of men.

Irigaray interprets the relations between women and the universal in the following way:

> L'universel pour la femme se réduit donc à un travail pratique inclus dans l'horizon de l'universel délimité par l'homme... la femme est aussi privée de la possibilité d'un universel pour elle-même. L'amour, pour elle, correspond à un devoir, et non un droit, qui établit son rôle dans le genre humain où elle apparaît la servante de l'homme. L'homme, lui se livre à la singularité de l'amour comme régression à l'immédiateté naturelle. L'amour avec une femme dans son foyer représente le repos complémentaire à son travail de citoyen.[83]

In the same passage, Irigaray also explains that since

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[81] Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London:Methuen,1984),p.80.

[82] Reference to Michael Inwood, in *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford:Blackwell,1992),pp.302-303.

[83] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1922),p.45.

men are supposed to be the guarantors of universality, they have the right to represent the human race as well as the polis. Indulging in love, for men, thus corresponds to a form of regression in comparison with their participation in the making of civil society and the state. Women's duty is to support men in this demanding task so that men can build the family as a privileged place where unity, ethical life and property create a sense of security for all the members of the family. However, this is done at the expense of women whose specificity as subjects is obliterated by their role of supporters and guardians of family life.

> Sa femme ou une autre doit de lui accorder cette régression par rapport au dur travail de l'universel qu'il assure... Mais elle doit aussi le renvoyer à cette tâche, l'éloigner d'elle, l'engendrer sans cesse comme artisan de l'esprit universel... La finalité de l'amour pour les époux est, au fond, d'acquérir un capital familial... La famille apparaît comme un lieu privilégié de constitution de la propriété.[84]

Men, however, can enjoy the universality they have access to through their involvement with civil society and the state. They can also enjoy the private spheres of the family without losing any of their prerogatives because they are in a position to work for the universal at a higher level than women since they are speaking subjects who possess the power to name and to participate in the construction of reality and truth.

As far as reality expresses all that can be taken as an

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[84] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),pp.45-46.

object of consciousness and therefore be included in its development, it can be accessible to women and experienced by them. For instance, women can comprehend the structures of civil society although they have no authority in that domain. They can be considered to be an integral part of civil society since they are the main element and support of the family as an institution. Nonetheless, in the Hegelian system, the family only corresponds to an elementary level where full development of the self cannot take place. According to Hegel rationality presupposes the idea of full development; it also implies that the rational subject can engage in reflective thought and purposeful activity in order to understand and reach truth. Hegel insists that this phase cannot be attained by women because they are not capable of conceptual reasoning. Irigaray endorses this point of view:

> L'homme comme animal doué de langage, comme animal rationnel, a toujours représenté le seul sujet du discours possible, le seul sujet possible. Et sa langue apparaît comme l'universel même... cet a priori n'est jamais apparu, n'apparaît pas encore, comme devant être mis en cause.[85]

Women's main purpose, according to Hegel, is the appropriation of the private spheres since they cannot have any real ascendancy over the outer world. As a result, they attempt to bring universal activity to the level of individual experience. Thus Hegel accuses women of being men's downfall by attempting to retain men in the family unit to which they give prominence over communal life and spirit.

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[85] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.281.

This process can be compared to a battle between the various forms of individualism embodied by women and the imperatives imposed by the universal spirit represented by the ethical order which is guaranteed by male citizens.[86] Hegel's following statement illustrates this point:

> Womankind - the everlasting irony [in the life] of the community - changes by intrigue the universal end of the government into a private end, transforms its universal activity into a work of some particular individual, and perverts the universal property of the state into a possession and ornament for the Family.[87]

This judgement shows that the dilemma posed by the constant battle between the private and the public, the former being attributed to women and the latter to men, is never solved. Irigaray explains this standpoint by saying that Hegel, like most western male philosophers, chooses not to take sexual difference into account as a possibility of producing a two-dimensonial discourse of reality. Instead, he falls back into a binary system which establishes a hierarchy between male and female subjects resulting in the subjugation of the female subject by the male economy:

> La méthode de Hegel est appuyée sur la contradiction, les contradictoires. Or le sexe n'obéit pas à la logique de la contradiction. Il est ployé, plié dans

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[86] In this context, the meaning of 'spirit' is that of 'objective spirit', that is to say: "the common spirit of a social group, embodied in its customs, laws and institutions, and permeating the character and consciousness of the individuals belonging to the group". Definition provided by Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford:Blackwell,1992),p.275.

[87] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V.Miller (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1977),p.288.

cette logique, mais il n'y est pas conforme.[88]

The logic Irigaray mentions can be understood, in this context, as the law of the family which imposes a given form of reality aiming to determine specific identities and functions to men and women. But these identities, such as those of the mother and the father, fix the subject, particularly the female subject who does not have a life outside the family, in a role that seems inescapable, for it is perceived to be part of the substance of life and therefore as an unavoidable destiny. Irigaray also adds that Hegel's conception of the family makes it impossible for its members to develop as sexuate individuals, *individus sexués*, and to engage in constructive communication between themselves:

> Le concret, que quête Hegel dans l'individu, est amputé de sa dimension sexuée. Il est déjà abstrait. Cette abstraction oblige à penser la famille comme substance indifférenciée et non comme lieu d'une individuation, d'une différentiation spirituelle qui exige quelque polémique entre les sexes pour devenir.[89]

The polemic Irigaray refers to is a form of dialectics where

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[88] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.153.

[89] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.151. The term 'sexuate' is used here to stress the difference between the expressions 'gender' and 'sex' made by Anglo-American feminists and Irigaray's term '*sexué*' which is not equivalent to sex or gender. In the context of this thesis 'sexuate', a word coined by Whitford, is the translation of '*individu sexué*' corresponding to Irigaray's desire to posit men and women,'*les deux genres*', as two equal but different subjects whose sex should be seen as a legitimate component of female and male subjectivity and not as a way of discriminating against women. This point will discussed in more detail in chapters Two and Three.

the male and female speakers express their difference and specificity as two parts of the universal which can act as a way of mediating between them in order to establish a dialogue instead of negating the female subject by submitting the female speaking subject to the arbitrariness of the patriarchal discourse. She explains that western philosophical discourse, such as Hegel's discourse, is not prepared to review the principles supporting its theory of the universal. This discourse usually claims to represent and guarantee truth and reality: "Mais il y a des résistances, notamment par incapacité du discours à repenser un universel comme médiation et non comme vérité tributaire de formes arbitraires".[90] Irigaray also stresses the fact that a dialectic between men and women is not conceivable in the Hegelian system where the quest for totality and the absolute spirit can only be achieved by the male subject who, as a citizen and an active member of the state, has the power to do so. The absolute spirit excludes the notion of sexuate identity. This idea is developed in *J'Aime à Toi* where Irigaray explains that the position of submission determining the female subject cannot be overcome because the female subject is confined to a situation similar to that of the slave: "[...]dans le système hégelien... le passage à l'esprit absolu, un esprit absolu en fait déterminé comme unisexe donc non comme universel... L'identité sexuée exclut

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[90] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés*, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),pp.142.143.

toute forme de totalité [...]".[91] According to Irigaray patriarchal discourse does not wish to separate the notions of sex and gender.[92] What Irigaray means here is that in the male philosophical discourse, women are seen as either mothers, wives or daughters, but not as independent female subjects whose sex can have her own speaking voice expressed through a female 'I', the feminine 'I'. The 'I' of discourse is the masculine 'I' which subsumes its feminine counterpart the existence of which is not recognized as such.[93]

In Hegelian philosophy, women are condemned to remain in a state of immaturity corresponding to pre-consciousness or pre-rationality. The fact that women are confined to the 'nether world' of the family prevents them from amalgamating the private and the public to posit themselves and act as citizens whose rights as legitimate speaking subjects are recognized by civil society and the state. Although Hegel specifies in 'Lordship and Bondage' that consciousness can resist alienation, this form of resistance does not apply to the relationship linking men and women. The philosopher

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[91] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),pp.164-165.

[92] Irigaray does not use the notions of sex and gender in the same way as British or American feminists do. For her the word 'sex' means either sexual organs or, as in this passage, it stands for men or women. The notion of gender either refers to grammatical gender or it means kind, sort or race as specified by Whitford. *The Irigaray Reader*,ed. by Margaret Whitford, (Oxford:Blackwell,1991),p.17-18.

[93] This point will be discussed in the next chapter.

tends to associate women with plants; he describes them as passive and inept in achieving the full development of the self. In *Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle* Irigaray refutes Hegel's declaration. She explains that it is impossible for the female subject to create a place for herself as a speaking subject because the situation in which she is placed does not enable her to construct her own subjectivity. "Selon les termes de la dialectique hégelienne, cette situation pourrait s'analyser comme demeurer du féminin dans le monde végétal sans possibilité de se créer un territoire animal".[94] The female speaking subject then has no choice but to live for the other which is the family and to speak the language of the Other of the Same. They are: "[...] gardiennes de la maison, des enfants au nom des biens, des lois, des droits et obligations, de l'Etat de l'autre".[95] There is no future, *devenir*, in Irigarian terms, for the female speaking subject in a world where the conditions structuring the situation of enunciation excludes the female subject from the polis. In the Hegelian framework, women cannot participate in the creation of meaning. Nor can they give their own version or understanding of reality and truth since these functions are allocated to what Irigaray calls

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[94] Luce Irigaray, *Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1984),p.105.

[95] Luce Irigaray, *Ethique de la Différence Sexuelle* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1984),pp.121-122.

'the dominant part of the world'.[96] This means that only male subjects are given the right to exercise such a prerogative.

[96] This expression is used throughout Irigaray's work. It refers to male subjects empowered by the male economy.

3. DISCOURSE OF UNIVERSALITY AND SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE.

In the first part of this chapter, I have shown that Lacan's theory of the symbolic order and Hegel's theory of the family are part of the male discourse of universality denying women the possibility of positing themselves as subjects of enunciation. This denial will be interpreted as a form of symbolic violence which is imposed through the dominant discourse and disguised as a discourse of universality claiming to be neutral. To analyse the meaning and function of symbolic violence, a parallel will be drawn between Bourdieu's and Irigaray's interpretation of the use of universality as a mode of domination.

Firstly, a brief definition of symbolic violence will be given according to Bourdieu's approach. Although symbolic violence acts as a mode of oppression for men and women alike, as far as they are both determined by the dominant discourse, I will argue that male domination can be analysed as the paradigm of symbolic violence which will be interpreted, here, as an act of appropriation of the situation of enunciation.

3.1. Bourdieu's definition of symbolic violence.

Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as a symbolic power struggle which takes place through discourse or action but

which stays invisible as an act of violence since the way in which it is presented seems legitimate and even natural. Bourdieu uses the term 'symbolic' in connection with the notion of representation. Specific meanings and values are given to modes of representation and to ways of expressing ideas which shape knowledge and experience. Accardo explains the meaning of symbolic struggles in Bourdieu's theory as follows: "Les luttes symboliques ont pour enjeu principal la reconnaissance et la légitimité. La violence symbolique est l'effet de censure inhérente à tout acte d'imposition symbolique".[97] The reason why symbolic violence is not perceived or identified as such is because the structures supporting the power struggle and the language conveying its message are not analysed by the receiver who misrecognizes the crucial part played by symbolic violence in the construction of the subject. Bourdieu sums up the notion of misrecognition as follows:

> J'appelle méconnaissance le fait de reconnaître une violence qui s'exerce précisément dans la mesure où on la méconnaît comme violence; c'est le fait d'accepter cet ensemble de présupposés fondamentaux, pré-réflexifs... comme allant de soi, c'est-à-dire comme il est, et de le trouver naturel parce qu'ils lui appliquent des structures cognitives qui sont issues des structures mêmes de ce monde.[98]

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[97] Alain Accardo & Philippe Corcuff, *La Sociologie de Bourdieu*(Bordeaux: Le Mascaret,1986),p.235.

[98] Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses:Pour une Anthropologie Réflexive*(Paris:Les Editions du Seuil,1992),p.143.
The expression, *'structures cognitives'*, correspond to what Bourdieu calls a process of incorporation of the social structures by the agent. Human beings comprehend and assimilate social structures through a system of dispositions which are

The main ideas of this statement explain the process of domination. All subjects seem to spontaneously accept and take for granted what Bourdieu calls the fundamental presuppositions, '*pré-supposés*', which structure the principles of reality and truth governing our lives. These '*pré-supposés*', in the context of my argument, can be interpreted as statements, '*énoncés*', and actions which remain unquestioned. Most subjects are determined by this *modus operandi*. Bourdieu explains this phenomenum by saying that the cognitive structures used to understand and adapt to the structures of the world in which the subject lives are themselves a product of dominant powers, whatever their nature. In other words, the subject accepts the fundamental presuppositions imposed on him or her as a mode of knowledge and experience because he or she is conditioned to do so. The subject knows no other way of apprehending reality and the world. This amounts to saying that, unconsciously, the subject ends up by being a party to the system that implements symbolic violence:

> La violence symbolique est, pour parler aussi simplement que possible, cette forme de violence qui s'exerce sur un agent social avec sa complicité... Pour dire cela plus rigoureusement, les agents sociaux sont des agents connaissants qui, même quand ils sont soumis à des déterminismes, contribuent à produire l'efficacité de ce qui les détermine dans la mesure où ils structurent ce qui les détermine. Et c'est presque toujours dans les ajustements entre les déterminants et les catégories de

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structured by the dominant discourse. These dispositions also structure people's modes of perception and govern their actions without their knowing it. Bourdieu calls this system 'habitus'.

> perception qui les constituent comme tels que l'effet de domination surgit.[99]

For Bourdieu, everybody is an agent. An agent is a male or female individual who occupies a certain position in a specific 'field' such as educational, political or social 'fields'. The agent struggles to keep or improve his or her position in a given 'field' by using an array of strategies which will enable him or her to reach his or her goal. In this respect, the agent is active and has choices. On the other hand, the agent is also acted upon by symbolic and social structures which restrict his individual freedom of action within certain limits. In other words, the agent is also dependent on his or her individual dispositions or habitus as well as on the amount of 'capital' he or she possesses, be it a symbolic or a social form of 'capital'. The acquisition of 'capital' depends on the agent's position in his or her particular group or class. To sum up, agents are constructed in so far as they are : 'sujets d'actes de construction du monde social'.[100] The mechanisms of the habitus also enable agents to be active individuals as far as

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[99] Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses:Pour une Anthropologie Réflexive*(Paris, Les Editions du Seuil,1992),p.142.

[100] Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1979),p.545

they can adapt to and generate new circumstances when required.[101] However, the extent to which the dominant discourse, such as patriarchal discourse for instance, can be decisively changed remains marginal as long as it is not recognized as an act of symbolic violence.

3.2. Symbolic violence and appropriation of universality by the male discourse.

This section will attempt to show that the male discourse claims to be universal in order to monopolize and master the situation of enunciation. This act of monopolization will be interpreted as a form of appropriation equivalent to an act of symbolic violence.

3.2.1. Appropriation of the situation of enunciation.

As shown in the first part of this chapter, in Lacanian theory, 'having', '*l'avoir*', determines the nature of the position in which the male speaker is placed. 'Having' is synonymous with presence, the presence of the phallic which generates a power of representation guaranteed by the symbolic order. Thus, the position of the male speaker in the symbolic order is a position of domination based on the fact that he is the possessor of the Phallus representing meaning. The psychoanalytic discourse posits the male

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[101] Pierre Bourdieu, *Questions de Sociologie* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987),pp.134-135.

speaking subject as the only subject capable of producing a discourse generating reality and truth. The reason why the male speaker is accepted and recognized as the ultimate subject of enunciation cannot be explained by his presence alone or by the fact that he is supposed to speak a language of reason. The position he occupies in enunciation is what justifies his power of representation, which, in the Lacanian system, stems from the authority allocated to him by the Phallus or the Name-of-the-Father.

> [...] l'autorité vient au langage de l'extérieur, comme Benveniste le rappelle dans son analyse du *skeptron* que l'on tendait à l'orateur, selon Homère, au moment où il allait prendre la parole... Le pouvoir symbolique, pouvoir de constituer le donné en l'énonçant, d'agir sur le monde en agissant sur la représentation du monde... s'accomplit dans et par une relation définie qui crée la croyance dans la légitimité des mots et des personnes qui les prononcent et il n'opère que dans la mesure où ceux qui le subissent reconnaissent ceux qui l'exercent.[102]

The symbolic power Bourdieu refers to is similar to the Lacanian symbolic order. The symbolic order enables the male speaker to posit himself as a speaking subject in the enunciation and, at the same time, to produce a statement, '*un énoncé*', the aim of which is to construct modes of representation. The position of the male speaker is legitimated by the fact that he embodies the authority of the Name-of-the-Father which enables the male speaking subject to be recognized and accepted as a rational spokesman

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[102] Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses:Pour une Anthropologie Réflexive*(Paris: Les Editions du Seuil,1992),p.123.

representing truth. His discourse becomes performative only because the conditions of its production remain unquestioned and therefore the real nature of its intentions are misrecognized.

The male speaker is placed in a similar situation in the Hegelian system. He is placed in a situation of domination which guarantees the legitimacy of the situation of enunciation he occupies. As a citizen responsible for the well-being and development of civil society and the state, the male subject can acquire the necessary experience and knowledge to develop his self-consciousness and work for the universal. The discourse of the male subject is not powerful in itself. The power of his discourse derives from the position of rationality he is supposed to represent. According to Hegel, the male subject alone is capable of conceptual reasoning and of engaging in the quest for finitude and the absolute. Irigaray interprets the situation as follows:

> [...] cette totalité éthique correspond à un peuple d'hommes s'appuyant sur un droit édicté et régi par les hommes. Le peuple des hommes oublie qu'il est peuple en fonction de son genre. Il pense beaucoup de choses mais non son genre comme le lien entre les membres du peuple.[103]

Whilst the *skeptron* Bourdieu refers to could be said to correspond to the Phallus in the Lacanian theory, it could be

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[103] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.149.

compared to the power of self-consciousness which is the prerogative of the Hegelian male subject: "[...] the husband ...possesses as a citizen the self-conscious power of universality[...]".[104]

I would therefore argue that the position occupied in a situation of enunciation is not only determined by the dominant discourse itself, whether it is the Lacanian symbolic order or the supremacy of self-consciousness characterizing the Hegelian male subject. What matters is the situation or the locus of enunciation. If the situation shapes the patterns of perception so that the speaker can be seen as having power, then the male speaker perceives himself as a legitimate speaking subject and the female speaker also recognizes his power since she is placed, as is the male speaker, under the authority of the dominant discourse and its order of representation. However, her position in the situation of enunciation is one of submission.

There is no real power struggle in the appropriation of the situation of enunciation, for the female speaker is neither recognized as a legitimate speaking subject nor allowed to speak as a subject capable of conceptual reasoning. Symbolic violence, in Lacanian theory, can therefore be interpreted as an act of usurpation of the right

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[104] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans.by A.V.Miller (Oxford:Oxford University Press,1977),sec.457,p.274.

to speak and to name which belongs to the female subject. However, the act of appropriation of the locus of enunciation by the male speaking subject is legitimized by the order of the dominant discourse. Patriarchy's authoritarian discourse imposes its hierarchy through the male subject who monopolizes the right to produce meaning. This imposition is presented as an a-priori which remains unseen:

> [...] cet a-priori n'est jamais apparu, n'apparaît pas encore, comme devant être mis en cause. Une loi, perpétuellement méconnue, prescrit toutes réalisations de langage(s), toute production de discours... selon les nécessités d'*une* perspective, d'un point de vue, d'une économie: celle *de l'homme*, supposé représenter le genre humain.[105]

In Hegelian philosophy, the appropriation of the locus of enunciation by the male subject takes place in the family. The family is the place where the female speaker is confined and by the same token denied the possibility to speak as a speaking subject capable of asserting her rights in civil society or the state. She is confined to nature. The passage from family ethical life to absolute spirit is impossible for her: "[...] la famille... comme lieu d'une scission qui empêche le passage de la nature dans l'esprit".[106] In the Hegelian approach, the domination of the male discourse does not have to be explained by a concept such as that of the symbolic order; the male discourse

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[105] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.281.

[106] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.155.

posits itself as universal and its order is presented as being self-evident:

> [...] l'ordre masculin est si profondément enraciné qu'il n'a pas besoin de justification: il s'impose lui-même comme évident, universel (l'homme, *vir*, est cet être particulier qui s'éprouve lui-même comme universel, qui a le monopole de l'être homme, *homo*).[107]

In this context, symbolic violence is the direct imposition of a prevailing model of identity and thought presented as a natural act of rationality.

3.2.2. Appropriation of the right to name.

The discourse of universality is presented as a neutral discourse. According to Irigaray, this process is justified by the use of the pronoun 'one', '*on*', that is to say the scientific '*on*', which replaces the 'I' associated with subjectivity. Following Irigaray's reasoning, the scientific '*on*' will be analysed as a pronoun which has two main characteristics: objectivity and omnipresence. Irigaray sums up the situation as follows:

> Le neutre pourrait et devrait se parler par tout le monde. Ce qui est impossible, évidemment... Mais la science ne dit pas "je", ni "tu", ni "nous". Elle se dispense de cette polémique, elle l'interdit. Son sujet sera "on". Qui *on*? Un verbe déjà substantif, un acte déjà consacré ou patenté? Les verbes admis sont de l'énonciation déjà transformée en objet échangeable sans *pathos*. Sauf celui de la raison? D'une raison irréversible? Universelle?.[108]

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[107] Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses* (Paris: Les Editions du Seuil,1992),p.146.

[108] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,p.8.

In the first part of her statement, Irigaray implies that if the '*on*' was really neutral, this would mean that male and female speakers would be equal vis à vis the situation of enunciation, which is not the case. Moreover, the subject of science cannot be an 'I' or a 'we' since this subject is supposed to be completely detached from itself as well as from the area of study it is involved with in order to produce a theory or a discourse that can be objective and universal, that is to say, capable of embracing its area of research in its entirety. Therefore, the use of the '*on*' is the only way of producing a statement which can be formulated in a neutral and objective way. According to Irigaray, the use of the '*on*' enables the speaker to overcome the polemic of which the 'I' or the 'you' always seem to be a part; the '*on*' has no personal or collective history; it has no *pathos* which could mar the neutrality of its power of representation. The strength of the power of representation of the '*on*' is such that this pronoun is considered to be equivalent to a substantive representing the subject of science whose actions are legitimately accepted as neutral and rational: 'un acte déjà consacré et patenté'. The '*on*' can thus be used as an object of exchange or communication between rational thinkers to enable them to produce neutrally expressed findings, the scope of which will be asserted as universal.

The '*on*' is also omnipresent because its presence is

immaterial. The '*on*' is the subject of science, which means that the person contained in the pronoun '*on*' does not exist as a specific subject. The scientific subject represents every speaker, regardless of their sex or other particularities. Therefore the '*on*' can speak for and about everybody, for and about the other. The situation of enunciation, in this case, can be said to be subsumed by the statement, '*l'énoncé*'. What matters for the '*on*' is to formulate norms that can be accepted and recognized as universal because they seem to be natural. They can therefore be taken for granted as their validity is seemingly guaranteed by the neutrality of their conditions of production, that is to say, by their situation of enunciation.

Irigaray sees the claim of neutrality and universality of the scientific '*on*' as a way to disguise the male discourse. According to her, the use of the '*on*' is a form of imperialism which conceals the real nature of its discourse and the identity of its speaker. This imperialism is without a subject.

> [...] un *on* impérialistement là, dont les préposés au pouvoir, les politiques peuvent user suivant les opportunités. Au moment où les scientifiques réagissent, les dés ne sont-ils pas déjà jetés? Au nom de la science? Impérialisme sans sujet'. [109]

In fact, the '*on*' speaks the same language and adopts the

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[109] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1985), p.309.

same codes as those used by the male speaking subject in the dominant order. But this dissimulation is not apparent because the subject of science does not really exist as such. It has no specific origin or sex. It is detached from its materiality.

The question of materiality can be illustrated by looking at psychoanalytic and philosophical discourses. In Lacanian theory, the male subject renounces his physical and affective attachment to the mother during the Oedipal phase. Only then can he enter the phallic order and become a male subject who is able to deny his materiality, that is to say his relationship with his mother's body or to his own body. Irigaray stresses the fact that the male subject never acknowledges the debt to the mother since all matters related to the body are repressed and must be censored from the male discourse. In Irigarian terms, the debt to the mother is a way of acknowledging that the mother gives birth to the child and consequently, the links between mother and child should be as important as those existing between father and child. The relationship between father and child is materialized by the prevailing presence of the phallus in the symbolic order. This means that the debt to the father is paid, so to speak, since the child, be it male or female, has to inscribe itself in the male order or male genealogy. But through this process the mother disappears; she is relegated to materiality, *'le substrat matériel'*; she becomes the

unconscious of male consciousness and is spoken for by the male 'I'.[110]

> Cette dette impayée, et pour une part impayable, mais dont il conviendrait de prendre acte se rappellerait dans l'impossibilité du rapport sexuel, et dans l'obligation de reproduire: des enfants, des fantasmes, de la théorie, de la science, etc. Mais ce sont les femmes qui continueraient d'en fournir le substrat matériel: le corps, le sang, la vie dont ils se nourrissent, tandis que vous exerceriez le pouvoir de vos organes.[111]

Following this reasoning, I will therefore argue that the attempt of the Lacanian discourse to empty the male subject of its materiality is the same as that of the scientific approach, the aim of which is to produce a subject of science totally cut off from any preoccupation regarding its origins and corporeality. In this case, the male 'I' would hold the same discourse as that produced by the scientific '*on*'.

Setting a male discourse, through the use of the '*on*', as a model of rationality and universality on the grounds that materiality has to be disregarded, is a way of establishing modes of perception resulting in the imposition

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[110] The debt to the mother is a recurring theme in Irigaray's work. It will be discussed in more detail with reference to different contextual frameworks in the following chapters.

[111] This quotation is extracted from 'Misère de la Psychanalyse', where Irigaray provocatively critizes the methods and theories of contemporary Lacanian psychoanalysts in a very powerful way. The '*vous*' refers to these psychoanalysts who, are mostly male. The term '*organ*', obviously refers to the phallus and the phallic order. Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.270.

of patterns of classification.[112] If the *'on'*, as a neutral speaker, is accepted and recognized as being capable of setting a system of classification whereby a system of divisions between concepts and subjects represents reality, certain patterns of perception are defined. This means that by associating the discourse of the male speaking subject with that of the scientific *'on'*, categories will be established and modes of representation and expression will be codified. If the *'on'* states that reality and truth can only be apprehended and analysed through conceptual discourse, this will imply that this task will automatically be allocated to the male subject. Women, who are associated with nature and reproduction, will be perceived as inadequate or incapable participants. By deduction, the *'on'* cannot represent women who are perceived to be part of nature, immediacy and intuition as stated in Hegelian philosophy. I will argue that by using the *'on'* to implement patterns of classification claiming to have the value of universal categories, the male discourse gives itself the possibility of creating a space where it can assert its domination. Although the male speaking subject is himself determined by the patriarchal order or the phallic economy, he perceives

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[112] In Bourdieu's theory, patterns of classification are principles of categorization which claim to be organised scientifically, that is to say, that they are formulated in a supposedly neutral language, and are the result of neutral investigations carried out by experts specialized in their specific field. For Bourdieu, to classify is to codify, therefore to establish a system of divisions in order to define specific models.

himself as being the dominant speaker in the situation of enunciation. He also perceives the female speaker either as a pale replica of himself or as a passive recipient of the male order justified by the '*on*'. Symbolic violence is then exerted firstly by dissimulating the male 'I' behind the scientific '*on*' and secondly by the shaping of the modes of perception that determine experience and identity. "Et c'est presque toujours dans les ajustements entre les déterminants et les catégories de perception qui les constituent comme tels que l'effet de domination surgit".[113]

The '*on*', then, appears as omnipresent, either by setting itself as a scientific neutral observer, or as an 'I' who beholds and represents reality and truth. In either case, the *on* seems to produce a discourse equivalent to a metalanguage supposed to be detached from its source of study and its method of investigation when, in fact, it is speaking for the male subject, the 'I' who monopolizes the situation of enunciation.

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[113] Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses: Pour une Anthropologie Rélexive* (Paris:Les Editiond du Seuil,1992)p.142.

Conclusion.

In this chapter, I have shown that the dominant discourse which shapes the conditions of enunciation by positing one model of identity, one mode of existence and one legitimate speaking subject, the male speaking subject, is the patriarchal discourse.

For Lacan, the politics of '*l'avoir*' assert the right of the male subject of enunciation by privileging phallic representation and desire as well as the specular. For Hegel, only the male subject can be a citizen in his own right. His task is to work for the universal. He is also the only legitimate subject of enunciation. In both cases, the production of '*l'énoncé*' is entirely governed by the symbolic order or by an order of consciousness which either negates or excludes the female subject and therefore makes it impossible for her to become a subject of enunciation. Consequently, the situation of enunciation can only produce one order of knowledge and experience, that of the male economy.

In agreement with Irigaray's analysis, I have interpreted the domination of the patriarchal discourse as a form of imperialism in the sense that this discourse appropriates the right to legitimize and enforce one version of truth and reality. This act of monopolisation remains unrecognized as it is conveyed through a discourse claiming to be universal

and neutral. The presence of women in Western thought is undeniable. However their presence corresponds to an abstract reality and it is precisely the abstraction of this reality which remains unrecognized as the expression of symbolic violence. Denying women the status of legitimate subjects and confining them to be the reflection or the subordinate of the male subject is the direct consequence of this act of symbolic violence. The female subject cannot identify herself with the models produced by the male discourse or the dominant order. She cannot position herself as a subject of enunciation. She does not possess the means to effectively distinguish herself from the discourse to which she is submitted for she does not have the power to speak as a subject. What the female subject needs is to change the existing conditions of enunciation by creating a legitimate space from which she has the power to name. The plausibility of such a project will be discussed in the second chapter by looking at the validity of Irigaray's proposals in this domain.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM ENUNCIATION TO FEMALE GENEALOGY: RECONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMALE SUBJECT.

If one admits, as demonstrated in chapter one, that women cannot be considered to be legitimate subjects, how can they make their voice heard as subjects of enunciation? This chapter will examine the possibility of recreating a space enabling women to justify their power to name. If women can assert their position as legitimate speaking subjects, they should then be able to be recognized as citizens in their own right in society. In this part of the debate, I will concentrate on Irigaray's propositions regarding the implementation of female genealogy which, I suggest, can be seen as an alternative to the dominant discourse.

> Elles veulent, sans fin ni modèle, le vouloir supposé de qui chemine dans le vouloir - modèle sans modèle, exemple dont elles effacent le paradigme. Elles veulent s'emparer de ce qui déjà existe pour le ramener à une source invisible - la leur? -, un lieu à partir duquel elles créeraient, se créeraient *ex nihilo*?[1]

What really matters for Irigaray is to suggest ways in which women can reappropriate their rights as legitimate speaking subjects. This project necessitates the rearticulation of the position of enunciation which amounts to establishing a space where the female subject can situate herself in a culture representative of her specific existence and history. For Irigaray, the first stage in

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[1] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.296.

the reconstruction of the female subject is to restructure a genealogy based on the relationship between mother and daughter. This relationship has a symbolic meaning; it functions as a model of associations between mothers and daughters as well as between women. Its aim is to give back to women the sense of belonging to a specific identity, female identity, which has been subsumed by male genealogy and the models of identity and practices it has imposed. Hence the need to establish a space 'without models' from which the female subject can recognize and recreate herself '*ex nihilo*'.

To articulate my argument for a female genealogy, I have chosen to follow Whitford's interpretation suggesting that Irigaray sees a space for a female genealogy as a base from which women could gradually become conscious of their own potential as speaking subjects and could position themselves as such in the symbolic.[2] I would also argue that a sense of belonging to a legitimate female genealogy could enable women to acquire the self-confidence to act as citizens in their own right in society.

> [...] nous devons par nécessité être des sujets sexués féminins. C'est aussi une question éthique par rapport aux autres femmes, mères et soeurs, naturelles et spirituelles...Je veux pour moi et pour les autres une liberté enracinée dans l'identité de

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[2] This suggestion is made throughout Margaret Whitford's book, *Luce Irigaray:Philosophy in the Feminine* (London:Routledge,1991).

> mon genre.[3]
>
> Leur réalisation suppose de la part des femmes un double effort... Ce double effort pour les femmes consiste à interpréter leur situation ou statuts actuels non seulement en termes économiques mais aussi en termes symboliques.[4]

The process of reconstruction Irigaray proposes to undertake, in my view, depends on the realization of the sensible transcendental, which I interpret here, as the alliance between matter and spirit, the former being the role female morphology plays in the construction of identity and the latter representing the very concept of female genealogy. In this chapter, two main points will be looked at to explain how the reconciliation between matter and spirit could work: firstly, on a theoretical level, the rearticulation of the space of enunciation will be analysed in relation to Irigaray's project related to female genealogy. Secondly, on a pragmatic level, Irigaray's project for a new socio-cultural order specific to female genealogy will be interpreted as a process consisting of three different phases: the modification of language, the application of Sexual Difference as a cultural practice in society, female genealogy and *l'entre-femmes*, and the function of what Irigaray calls the 'negative', '*le négatif*', which will be briefly introduced.

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[3] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.117-120.

[4] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche,1989),pp.51-52.

1. REARTICULATION OF THE SPACE OF ENUNCIATION.

Irigaray claims that the female subject could be posited as a speaking subject if a maternal order could act as referent and legitimate guarantor of a female culture. The term maternal, here, is used in connection with female genealogy rather than in relation to the mother/daughter relationship.

As she is neither a subject in her own right in the symbolic nor a citizen in her own right in society, the female subject must re-establish a link between herself as a woman and her self as a speaking subject. To do so, Irigaray claims that the female subject needs to rearticulate this link as a process to be inscribed in history.

Irigaray criticizes the way patriarchal discourse automatically assumes that links between mothers and daughters or between women, are based on their supposedly primary concern with reproduction. In patriarchal culture motherhood is both identity and destiny; being a mother is being alive and being a woman whose role, ideally, is to be the moral guarantor of patriarchal order.

> Cette maternité - promue par les chefs spirituels comme le seul destin valable pour les femmes - signifie le plus souvent perpétuer une généalogie de type patriarchal en faisant des enfants au mari, à l'Etat, aux pouvoirs culturels masculins... Pour les femmes, plus secrètement, la maternité représente le seul remède contre la déréliction ou la déchéance

> imposées dans l'amour par les instincts masculins, et aussi un chemin pour renouer avec leur mère et les autres femmes. Comment en sommes-nous arrivées là, nous tous, et, en particulier, nous les femmes?[5]

The interesting point about Irigaray's desire to construct a female genealogy is that it is not based on the maternal links imposed by patriarchal order. Her project has two main aims: firstly to give women the chance to dissociate themselves from their biological and reproductive functions which they can adopt as a choice but not as destiny; secondly, to make women aware that they can reconstruct themselves as speaking subjects in their own right. Women must strive to become makers of female history. I would suggest that the role of history, for Irigaray, at this stage, is to make the female symbolic as well as cultural practices reflecting female specificity visible in society. To guarantee the validity of Sexual Difference, it is necessary to legitimize rights particular to women.[6] Irigaray places the mother at the root of female genealogy. But the Irigarian mother does not belong to a matriarchal system which could seem to be the counterpart of the existing patriarchal organization of society. Since matriarchy is still a subdivision, that is to say, a subordinate element in patriarchal hierarchy, it

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[5] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence: Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche,1989)p.111.

[6] The questions of rights specific to women, *sexuate* rights, and of female agency in society are discussed in detail in chapters Three and Four.

cannot stand as an oppositional form to a structure which denies its existence in its own right. For Irigaray, in order to exist, the very idea of the mother has to be completely dissociated from the male economy and from men's needs. According to her, the mother has been sacrificed to and by the Symbolic Order.

> Quand Freud décrit et théorise, notamment dans *Totem et tabou*, le meurtre du père comme fondateur de la horde primitive, il oublie un meurtre plus archaïque, celui de la femme-mère, nécessité par l'établissement d'un certain ordre dans la cité.[7]

Thus, following the psychoanalytical model, society ignores and denies the power of the mother as a symbolic figure capable of personifying a potential female order specific to women.

> Le phallus s'érige là où était le cordon ombilical? Il devient organisateur du monde par l'homme-père là où le cordon ombilical, lien premier à la mère, a donné naissance au corps de l'homme et de la femme... quand le nom propre est donné à l'enfant, il se substitue déjà à la marque la plus irréductible de la naissance, le nombril. Le nom propre, et déjà le prénom, glissent sur le corps tels des revêtements, des pièces d'identité... L'ordre social, notre culture, la psychanalyse elle-même, le veulent ainsi: la mère doit rester interdite, exclue.[8]

What matters to Irigaray, is to give women back a sense of identity by suggesting that a female genealogy based on the symbolic meaning of a powerful mother can help women to reassert themselves as individual speaking subjects.

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[7] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.23.

[8] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions du Seuil,1987),p.26.

This is why the philosopher emphasizes the need to have a female model of subjectivity which is neither a replica of the male subject nor a neutral subject who is still a cultural copy of the male archetype.

> Les généalogies mères-filles ont été sacrificiées aux généalogies patriarchales.[9]
>
> Pour se constituer comme identité sexuelle, une relation généalogique avec son genre ... [celui de la femme] est nécessaire.[10]

To exist as a woman, the female subject must have a place and a symbolic figure to identify with in order to decolonize what Irigaray calls her 'genre', that is to say, as explained by Whitford, womankind.[11]

> Pour devenir, il est nécessaire d'avoir un genre ou une essence (dès lors sexuée) comme horizon. Sinon, le devenir reste partiel et assujetti. Devenir parties ou multiples sans futur propre aboutit à s'en remettre à l'autre ou l'Autre de l'autre pour son rassemblement. Devenir signifie accomplir la plénitude de ce que nous [les femmes] pouvons être.[12]

The expression 'l'Autre de l'autre' is an indirect

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[9] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Genres à travers les Langues* (Paris: Grasset, 1990),p.14.

[10] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.37.

[11] Margaret Whitford, *The Irigaray Reader: Luce Irigaray* (London:Routledge,1991)p.17.

Irigaray talks about 'le genre féminin' and 'le genre masculin'. The word 'genre' cannot be translated as 'gender', as explained in chapter One. Therefore, I will use the word 'group' to refer to 'genre', to indicate the idea of a gathering of people of the same sex who belong to the same genealogy, and share the same sense of common history and pers
ypective, whether they are male or female.

[12] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.73.

reference to the Lacanian interpretation of otherness. It means that women can only have an identity if this identity is constructed in relation to that of the male subject, the only valid model for the specular other. As discussed in chapter One, the other, the child, is a reflection of the other represented here by the mother, as for instance, is the case during the mirror stage. The mother has to be renounced so that the child can enter language. Therefore, the other, in this context, is not an empowering subject.

On the other hand, the speaking subject's utterance only acquires its meaning from what is said in the discourse guaranteed by the Symbolic Order. The female subject has no Symbolic place from which to speak as a legitimate subject; therefore her utterance is conditioned by her lack, her lack of being and of power. She can only be the by-product of the male speaking subject's utterance; she can also be relegated to what cannot be said, such as '*jouissance*', constituting excess, which still cannot be articulated, and consequently, still cannot give her a place from which to speak. She remains the other of the male speaking subject, the other of reality imposed by the dominant order.

Irigaray claims that if women were respected as speaking subjects, the order of discourse could be changed.

Until now, women have been used as objects of discourse or predicates.

> Il nous manque, nous sexuées selon notre genre, un Dieu à partager, un verbe à partager et à devenir... Définies comme substance-mère, souvent obscure, voire occulte, du verbe des hommes, il nous manque notre sujet, notre substantif, notre verbe, nos prédicats: notre phrase élémentaire... notre généalogie... Etre le terme de l'autre n'a rien à envier. Cela nous paralyse dans notre devenir.[13]

According to Irigaray, the content of meaning is male and the container is female. I suggest that this assumption can be interpreted as follows: the signified is male and the signifier is female. The former represents the 'matter' and 'spirituality' of meaning, whilst the latter works as a supposedly natural material support, '*l'englobant*' or '*substrat*' of meaning.[14]

> [...] mais dans le concept, la scission reste celle du féminin et du masculin...Le concept a deux héros. Mais l'un est réduit à une marque, un masque inapproprié, un vêtement imputé, l'autre est supposé devenir la matière, le sujet [...].[15]

The signified 'marks' the signifier, and as such, ends up determining and containing its existence although this process is unconscious. Not only does the signified 'mark' the signifier, but it also works as the basis of its very existence. In other words, meaning, and thus, by extension, the sign, is entirely made and conditioned by

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[13] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.83.

[14] The words in inverted commas are terms used by Irigaray throughout her work.

[15] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.126.

the signified which contains all forms and contents of meaning; hence the universality of its nature and function: "Le masculin devient le substrat de l'englobant, et la source qui l'assure...[le masculin est] le substrat absolu".[16] This means that women are only components of meanings and components which depend on the male 'source' to exist. Therefore they can only play an insignificant role, if any at all, in the discourse that constructs universality.

Irigaray challenges the assumption of the dominant discourse:

> Le fait théorique ou pratique de définir les femmes comme parties d'un tout (une + une + une..) est une façon de ne pas reconnaître leur genre propre, leur individualité à vocation universelle... Leur identité se tient dans la non-scission systématique de la nature et de l'esprit, dans la retouche de ces deux universels... Il n'y va pas seulement de la mère mais de la femme déjà.[17]

In order to reposition the female subject as a speaking subject, the roles allocated to the male subject must be rethought. According to Irigaray, the male economy refuses to question the imperialism of its discourse made of 'truth reliant on its arbitrary forms'.[18] The philosopher argues that the two parts constituting universalism, namely,

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[16] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.126.

[17] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés*, (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987)p.126.

[18] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.143.

spirit and matter, are prominent in the construction of the subject. The male subject cannot be said to correspond to spirit, and the female subject cannot be equated to matter. The female must be recognized as an entity, a synthesis of both.

> La femme est entière et universelle, universelle si entière. Notre culture a là aussi inversé l'ordre des choses; ce qui explique que l'esprit y soit devenu étranger à lui-même.[19]

There again, Irigaray comes back to the idea that the division of matter and spirit has caused the exclusion of women from a symbolic space from which they could be recognized as speaking subjects; this division has also denied men the possibility of acknowledging the role of their corporeality in their existence thus forcing them to disregard or reject a whole part of their self.[20]

> [...] la scission du corps et de l'esprit qui se met en place lors du sacrifice du féminin à l'Etat, lors de l'accès de l'homme à la citoyenneté et à une culture neutralisée du point de vue du genre.[21]

Men are conditioned by patriarchal order so that they ignore the role of nature in their identity. This takes place in a disguised manner: " L'inconscient est partiellement l'enterrement en lui par l'homme de l'autre

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[19] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.126.

[20] This particular point will be mentioned in more detail in chapter Four in relation to differences between heterosexual and gay men.

[21] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.127.

genre et de l'ombre de son genre, les deux".[22] However, women are not allowed to disregard nature since they are always driven back to it.

Instead of denying a part of himself to fit the model of universality shaped by patriarchal imperatives, Irigaray claims that the male subject should learn from the female subject and accept the fact he is also made of matter and spirit. The philosoper thinks that, initially, women's role is to make men aware of the necessity to rethink the principles of universality. It is also women's role, at first, to bring the dominant discourse to reformulate the conditions of enunciation and to acknowledge the fact that women should be posited as speaking subjects. In this context, neutrality could be distinguished from male discourse. It should give both speaking subjects the opportunity of articulating their own specificity. This is what the philosopher sets out to do in *J'Aime à Toi*, which outlines a project of intersubjective relations between men and women. In this book, Irigaray states that the obligation of instigating linguistic and cultural changes rests on the female speaking subject as well on the male speaking subject.[23]

Creating a space from which women can make their voice

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[22] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.128.

[23] Irigaray's concept of intersubjectivity will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

heard as speaking subjects also necessitates unity. Irigaray argues that if women are to be positioned as subjects of enunciation, they have to assert their values and needs as a group which can define itself with reference to a female self, symbolizing womankind. The philosopher advocates that if the female subject can posit herself and act as a speaking subject, in other words, if women can have a symbolic space materialized in history through the implementation of a female genealogy, equality with men can be envisaged, provided the culture of sexual difference is legitimized. Women need to recreate a sense of female identity and culture to fight the dominant culture aiming to separate women from each other:

> Selon ce monde, ces mondes, l'identité féminine est toujours reconduite à des paramètres empiriques qui empêchent une femme, et le monde des femmes, de se rassembler en tant qu'unité. La dimension sexuelle-familiale reste un de ces paramètres... les questions toujours posées et susceptibles de situer une femme... ne la situent que du dehors et par rapport à une fonction sociale et non une identité et une autonomie féminines.[24]

Although it is undeniable that female subjectivity is still negated and that a symbolic space still needs to be articulated it is not certain that all women can be equally represented as a group or made visible, and equally empowered by a female genealogy. This point will be discussed in the second part of this chapter in relation

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[24] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.85.

to *'l'entre femmes'* used as an example of practices designed to empower the female speaking subject in society. However, giving women back the possibility of repossessing their female identity with the help of other women may be the first necessary stage in the reconstruction of the position of enunciation.

2. RECONSTRUCTION OF A NEW SOCIO-CULTURAL ORDER SPECIFIC TO FEMALE GENEALOGY.

2.1. The modification of language.

> D'où venons-nous? A qui parlons-nous? Comment ne pas nous y perdre? ... L'analyse du langage est un précieux moyen d'information, et de prévision.... Un discours... est rarement neutre....[il est] toujours à reconstruire.[25]

According to Irigaray, to reconstruct linguistic practices the female subject must posit herself as a legitimate 'I'. This is the only way to change the dominant order of language. The philosopher states that it is necessary to refer back to the sexuate subject in order to produce discourse: "en repasser ou passer enfin par le *je*? Et le je *sexué*".[26]

Irigaray challenges the role the 'subject of science' plays in the production of language.[27] She also calls into question the language used to produce scientific

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[25] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions du Seuil,1985),p.11.

[26] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.14.

[27] The expression: 'the subject of science', 'le sujet de la science', is used by Irigaray in a chapter entitled: 'Le sujet de la science est-il sexué', in Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985)pp.317-321.

In this particular part of the chapter, the role of language will be discussed in the context of its symbolic association with 'having' and 'being'.

language. She argues that scientific language uses codes, symbols or signs in order to create ideal models of reality, 'modèles idéel ou idéal', claiming to reflect the only possible version of reality.[28] Irigaray uses the term '*idéel*' to indicate that the aim of the subject of science is twofold: firstly he endeavours to create ideal archetypes and secondly he sets up these archetypes as concepts supposed to be the result of an objective process. As shown in chapter One, such methods and means are based on the assumption that the 'subject of science' is completely detached from the object he investigates; his presence, identity, and, above all feelings, are not seen as determining factors in his research since a male subject, especially as a subject of science, is supposed to be capable of removing himself from his materiality.

> Toujours les hommes sont ceux qui ont parlé et surtout écrit: en sciences, philosophie, religion, politique... Il s'agit toujours de... construire un modèle *idéel* ou *idéal*, indépendant du physique et du psychique du producteur, selon des jeux d'induction et de déduction passant toujours par une élaboration idéale... "Nos expériences subjectives ou nos sentiments de conviction ne peuvent jamais justifier aucun énoncé" affirme l'épistémologue des sciences.[29]

Irigaray also underlines the fact that the universality of scientific findings is proven when the same characteristics can be applied to several identical subjects of

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[28] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.312.

[29] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.311-312. The terms in italics are in italics in the original text.

investigation. She adds that a version of the world corresponding to a unique model is then created and progress is presented as the elaboration of this model which is alleged to be beneficial or profitable to all.

It can be argued that Irigaray's reference to profitability characterizing the procedure adopted by the male subject of science can be interpreted in terms of symbolic violence. Profitability is a crucial element for the male economy since its aim is to accumulate positions of power which will indirectly enable men, in this context, male subjects of science, to carry on producing their own version of truth and reality. In this scenario, the visible, '*le privilège du visible*', in other words, 'having', '*l'avoir*', can be understood as principles of universality which generate legitimacy and give power to the producer representing the dominant discourse.[30] What is interesting to note here is the recurrence of two notions underlying Irigaray's reasoning. Visibility and 'having' function as signs inherent in the Same, that is to say, the male subject empowered by the Symbolic Order. Possession, be it goods or in this case, meaning and, above all, the profits deriving from it, are priorities in what the philosopher calls the economy of the Same. 'Having'

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[30] The notions of 'having', '*l'avoir*', and 'being', '*l'être*', are always at the basis of Irigaray's argument. It is argued, throughout the thesis, that these terms have several meanings which vary according to the context in which they are used by the philosopher.

is also a form of power which gives 'the subject of science' visibility and legitimacy as a privileged user of the language used by dominant discourse. In the language used by 'the subject of science', there is no room for difference, reciprocity and exchange:

> Il n'y a donc pas de signe:
> - de *différence* autre que quantitative
> - de *réciprocité* (autre que dans une même propriété ou un même ensemble)
> - d'*échange*
> - de perméabilité
> - de *fluidité*
>
> La syntaxe est dominée par:
> - l'*identité à*, s'exprimant par la propriété et la quantité;
> - la non-contradiction ...
> - les *couples d'opposés*: nature/raison, sujet/objet, matière/énergie, inertie/mouvement.[31]

The notion of a unique version of truth and reality emanating from the only subject, the male subject of science, does not allow difference and reciprocity because these two elements could offer new perspectives; these perspectives could permeate and even dismantle the absolute soundness of the discourse produced by the subject of science. This would be unacceptable if one accepts that meaning can only function on a basis of oppositions indispensable to the prevailing understanding of universality and to the guarantee of the fixed identity of the producer. This reasoning could be counterbalanced by referring to postmodern thought which acknowledges the

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[31] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985), p.313. The quotation is presented here as it is in the original text.

fluidity of identities and refutes the existence of one and only system of truth. However, Irigaray does not refer directly to this intellectual trend; nor does she believe in fluidity of identities.[32]

What matters more to her is to outline the possibility of creating a different discourse of reality and truth through linguistic practices giving female and male subjects the opportunity to exchange on an equal basis.[33] One of the main ideas to retain in Irigaray's critique of 'the subject of science', is that, the subject, be it male or female, is not an impermeable entity but a sexuate being who should acknowledge his/her corporeality and take it into account as part of his/her self. In other words, 'the subject of science' should not have to deny or ignore a part of himself or herself in order to be accepted as a valid producer of a language aiming to reflect truth and reality. Valid, in this context, has to be understood in relation to the notion of legitimacy as it is used in the dominant discourse, which implies that the only speaking subject capable of producing truth has to be the subject accredited by dominant power. Irigaray's interpretation is similar to Bourdieu's claim that official language is produced by dominant power that imposes its linguistic

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[32] The issue of fluidity of identities is discussed in chapter Four.

[33] This point is discussed in more detail in the last part of this chapter with reference to 'the negative', '*le négatif*'.

practices as the only acceptable forms of expression.

> [...] la langue est un *code*, ... au sens de système de normes réglant les pratiques linguistiques. La langue officielle a partie liée avec l'Etat. Et cela tant dans sa génèse que dans ses usages sociaux... cette langue d'Etat devient la norme théorique à laquelle toutes les pratiques linguistiques sont objectivement mesurées.[34]

Any other language or linguistic practices therefore lose some or all of their legitimacy unless they can claim to be neutral. Indeed, as already mentioned, the language used by the 'subject of science' does not have to pretend to be neutral to represent reality. Besides, neutral language, in Irigarian terms, means that dominant linguistic practices have to be adhered to. This is therefore another way of denying the female speaking subject the possibility of being recognized as a 'subject of science'.

One concrete example of this process of negation is that of conservative male philosophers who still obstinately refuse to acknowledge that feminist thought produced by female philosophers is part of philosophy. For example, in France, the work of Irigaray, Cixous, or Le Doeuff, is not recognized to be philosophical thought because these academics sometimes choose to express themselves outside the criteria fixed by prevailing philosophical canons.

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[34] Pierre Bourdieu, *Ce Que Parler Veut Dire: L'économie des Echanges Linguistiques* (Paris:Fayard,1982),p.27.

Another example is that of Simone de Beauvoir who is classified as a novelist and not a philosopher. It is well-known that in the case of De Beauvoir, although she and Sartre were trained philosophers who both obtained their qualification with distinction, only Sartre was a philosopher. Her contribution to his work was never acknowledged as such, not even by herself. In France, *Le Deuxième Sexe* is not considered to be a philosophical work by traditional academics although its mode of expression is traditional.

Irigaray challenges this modus operandi. By looking at various branches of modern science, she suggests ways in which scientific discourse could change its approach in order to avoid univocity, interpreted here as the constant return to the language and the identity of the Same, the Same of the Same. One example the philosopher refers to is linguistics.

> Les sciences linguistiques se sont attachées aux modèles d'énoncés, aux structures synchroniques du langage, aux modèles de langue dont tout sujet normalement constitué a l'intuition. Elles n'ont pas envisagé, et refusent même parfois de le faire, la question de la sexualité du discours. Elles acceptent - par nécessité - que certains termes du lexique soient ajoutés au stock admis, que de nouvelles figures de style éventuellement s'imposent, mais elles n'imaginent pas que la syntaxe et l'agencement syntaxico-sémantique soient déterminés sexuellement, non neutres ni universels et intemporels.[35]

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[35] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editins de Minuit,1985),p.314.

In this statement, the philosopher stresses the importance of the conditions in which change occurs. Modification of language can consist of the addition of words or in their adjustment, to mark the acknowledgement or acceptance of women's existence in certain domains. However, this remodelling of language still does not mean that women are legitimized as speaking subjects. For example, in English, what is supposed to be a neutral 'he', representing both 'he' and 'she', is now mainly expressed as 'he/she' in order to designate the distinctive identity of the speaker. Following the same train of thought, some expressions have changed, a 'chairperson' now replaces the word 'chairman'. Nonetheless there are still very few women occupying powerful positions as 'chairpersons'. In French, resistance to change is still very strong. Words such as '*député*' is used and not '*députée*'; expressions such as '*Mme. le Ministre*' is part of official language and is also used by the media. This discrepancy reflects the lack of legitimization of women as subjects in their own right, as speaking subjects who can represent and act as universal subjects.[36]

Irigaray's latest work aims to show the way language is gendered. In her recent research, she demonstrates that language is structured by a hierarchical system of

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[36] This argument will be analysed in more detail in the next part of this discussion on the function of language.

classifications unconsciously incorporated by the speakers. This process ends up shaping speakers' identities and practices. Irigaray speaks of laws of language as laws which are not formulated as such, 'lois non énoncées comme telles'.[37] I would suggest that her point of view is reinforced by similar approaches such as that of Bourdieu.

Bourdieu claims that language is an instrument used to secure or acquire a linguistic capital representing a form of power. Linguistic patterns corresponding to dominant discourse, 'la langue légitime', are acquired through what Bourdieu calls 'linguistic habitus', '*l'habitus linguistique*'. These patterns automatically establish a power relationship between the speakers:

> Tout acte de parole ou tout discours est une conjoncture, le produit de la rencontre entre un *habitus linguistique* et un *marché linguistique*, c'est à dire, d'un côté, un système de dispositions socialement constituées, qui implique une propension à parler d'une certaine manière et à formuler certaines choses ... en même temps qu'une compétence à parler définie inséparablement comme l'aptitude linguistique à engendrer... la capacité sociale d'utiliser adéquatement cette compétence dans une situation donnée et...un système de rapports de force symbolique qui s'imposent à travers un système de sanctions et de censures spécifiques qui contribuent par là à façonner la production linguistique.[38]

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[37] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.317.

[38] Pierre Bourdieu,*Réponses:Pour une Anthologie Réflexive* (Paris: Editions du Seuil,1992,pp.120-121.

In other words, the system of linguistic exchange, or 'linguistic market', is pre-determined from the start. This market places the speakers in positions of inequality. In a place of influence are those who can produce legitimate language because they are the representatives of dominant power, '*les porte-paroles*'. In the context of my argument, these representatives can be said to be equivalent to the male speaking subjects who produce and impose their 'linguistic products' as representing truth and reality, or in Irigarian terms, the products of male economy. Their discourse is legitimized by their position rather than by its actual content.

> Le pouvoir symbolique, pouvoir de constituer le donné en l'énonçant, d'agir sur le monde en agissant sur la représentation du monde... s'accomplit dans et par une relation définie qui crée la croyance dans la légitimité des mots et des personnes qui les prononcent et ils n'opèrent que dans la mesure où ceux qui le subissent reconnaissent ceux quil'exercent.[39]

The use of authority to establish and impose language, understood as man-made language, can be interpreted as an act of symbolic violence for two reasons: firstly because the producers of legitimate language take advantage of their position in the symbolic and in society, to justify the legitimacy of their linguistic products. Secondly, because the mechanisms of production of such a language are not always recognized by the receivers as a way of establishing a hierarchichal order of discourse in which

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[39] Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses:Pour une Anthropologie Réflexive* (Paris: Les Editions du Seuil,1992),p.123.

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the female speaker occupies a subordinate place in comparison with the male speaker.

Even when symbolic violence is denounced, as is the case with feminist critiques, changes can be instigated, at least partly, as the use of new expressions such as 'chairperson' has shown, indicating the presence of women as agents in society. But the impact of such actions is limited because the initial conditions of production of the linguistic market are still functioning. The linguistic market as a system of socio-political exchange between speakers, be they producers or consumers, is still guaranteed by patriarchal power. In patriarchal order there is no room for the discourse of the symbolic mother. Nor is there any possibility of materializing the sensible transcendental through language.

Irigaray proposes to change this linguistic market gradually by introducing respect for sexual difference in language as a cultural practice. To fight against the effects of symbolic violence rejecting women as legitimate speaking subjects, the philosopher advocates the gendering of language as a way of inscribing female genealogy in social order.

2.1.1. Changing discourse by introducing sexual difference in language.

According to Irigaray, sexual difference should be part of language not only as a marker of identity but also as a way of reintroducing the notion of quality. Quality plays an important part in Irigaray's critique of patriarchal dominance. She opposes quality to quantity, two notions symbolizing what she equates to 'being', '*l'être*" and 'having', '*l'avoir*'. In the context of discourse, I would suggest that 'being' can be interpreted in terms of presence and 'having' as the power to name. For the male subject, 'being' is the same as 'having' as Irigaray argues that in the dominant economy, 'being' is based on the accumulation of powers, be they political, financial or symbolic. The more powers a subject possesses the more likely he is to impose a mode of 'being' and therefore to legitimize it as a universal model of identity. Language is one of the tools used to implement these powers and shape identities.

> La multiplication des droits actuels se situe presque exclusivement dans la sphère des droits à la propriété de biens, d'avantages, de capitaux divers, etc. Elle se préoccupe beaucoup d'avoir(s) mais peu d'être(s)[...].[40]
>
> Le discours des hommes concerne en priorité les techniques de production concurrentielle d'objets consommables et échangeables (même dans la plupart des loisirs...). Il se préoccupe peu de la culture du

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[40] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence: Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.17.

> sujet sexué qu'est le locuteur masculin. Devenir homme correspondrait à s'éloigner de soi, de son environnement concret et vivant, à entrer dans un univers codé redoublant plus ou moins adéquatement la réalité, à acquérir l'aptitude à la compétition, à la guerre, etc... Il y a heureusement des exceptions à ces normes mais les règles sociales et linguistiques les entretiennent par tout un réseau.[41]

To prevent the female speaker from unconsciously reproducing the invisible 'laws of language' the philosopher claims that the modes of discourse production have to be modified. Two main points central to her argument will be discussed here: the role of quality in linguistic exchanges and the implementation of new linguistic practices.

2.1.2. Quality and exchange.

Firstly, systems of exchange must be qualitative and not quantitative. The criteria of enunciation must not be based on principles of restrictions facilitating or refusing the accumulation of powers depending on the identity of the speaker. In other words, the statement, '*énoncé*', should not have to correspond to what the dominant order considers to be acceptable norms, its norms, in order to be valid. The speaker, be it male or female, should be able to express himself or herself as a sexuate speaking subject following a sexuate logic, '*une logique sexuée*'. Both subjects should then be able to communicate

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[41] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.64.

freely as speaking subjects instead of conforming to the codes of language and power relations expected by what Irigaray calls the 'dominant logic', synonymous with 'le langage socialement recevable [qui est] toujours paternel'.[42] This would mean that the speakers would be able to extricate themselves from systems of hierarchy and binarism used by patriarchal discourse. Following this reasoning, I would argue that the mode of exchange between male and female speakers would have to be based on 'being', '*l'être*', read as an act of recognition of the presence of the other speaker as a speaking subject in her or his own right. This would enable both speakers to engage in a real discursive exchange, '*un rapport discursif entre deux sujets sexuellement différents*" instead of being governed by pre-established linguistic power relations.[43]

'Being', '*l'être*', necessitates the use and, when required, creation of a language which gives women the means to materialize their presence as speaking subjects, and not as possessors of man-made language and values. Irigaray's aim is to give the female speaker a specific and independent voice, and not predetermined products of expression reinforcing patriarchal domination:

Selon moi, il faut être un sujet féminin libre. Pour

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[42] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.317-319.

[43] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985)p.317.

> cette libération, la langue représente un outil de production indispensable... Je dois la faire évoluer pour avoir des droits subjectifs équivalents à ceux des hommes, pour pouvoir échanger du langage et des objets avec eux. Dans un cas, la libération des femmes met l'accent sur l'égalité de droits relatifs à la posséssion de biens: la différence entre hommes et femmes se situe dans la nature, la quantité, parfois la qualité des biens conquis, possédés. Dans l'autre cas, la libération sexuelle exige d'accéder à un statut subjectif, individuel et collectif, valable en tant que femme. L'accent est mis sur la différence des droits entre sujets masculins et sujets féminins.[44]

I would suggest that, 'having', '*l'avoir*', must be understood in this context, as the acquisition and use of linguistic practices designed to acquire powers of representation. Women can obtain these powers, although with great difficulty, but this appropriation cannot facilitate the legitimization of the female subject as a speaking subject. '*L'avoir*', here, acts as a mode of production marked by its sexist ideology. The studies of the use of language by men and women carried out by Irigaray and several international researchers who worked with her confirm this point of view. They all used the same corpora in French, English, Italian and German. The analysis of the corpora and the resulting comments constitute Irigaray's book entitled *Sexes et Genres à travers les Langues*, published in 1990.

Irigaray is particularly interested in the position the

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[44] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris: Grasset,1990),p.89.

male or female speaker, *'le sujet de l'énonciation'*, is choosing to take within a given sentence. The philosopher is not so concerned with the actual syntaxic function of the speaker, *'le sujet de l'énoncé'*.[45] The investigating teams came to these conclusions, reflected in all languages: women do not posit themselves as subjects in their own right; they tend to give way to the other who can be either the male speaker or another person like a child or even society. In other words, women do not see themselves as active agents who can have a power of decision or a determining impact on people and the world at large. They relate to people but seem to define themselves in relation to the outside or the other, whatever he/she may be, but do not control them.

> Le discours des femmes désigne les hommes comme sujets.... et le monde comme inanimés concrets appartenant à l'univers de l'autre. Les femmes gardent donc un rapport à l'environnement réel mais elles ne le subjectivent pas comme le leur.[46]
>
> [...] les femmes ayant tendance à s'effacer, à céder la place à "l'autre": l'homme, la société, le monde.[47]

This lack of subjectification has several consequences. Firstly women are dependent on others or other elements.

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[45] Reference to note 2, in *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)p.38.

[46] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)pp.42-43.

[47] Paula Ecimovic, 'Etude Comparative sur la Différentiation Sexuelle', in *Sexes et Genres à travers les Langues: Eléments de Communication Sexuée*, ed. by Luce Irigaray (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.261-283(p.282). Paula Ecimovic used English for her study.

Secondly, if they do not put themselves forward as agents responsible for the running of society, on an equal footing with men, that role is appropriated by men who also appropriate the *logos* which can be interpreted, in this context, as truth: '*vérité englobante*'.[48]

> Au niveau le plus archaïque, je pense qu'il y a identification de la réalité dénommée et du sexe du locuteur. La terre est femme, le ciel est son frère. Le soleil est l'homme, le dieu-homme. La lune est la femme, la soeur du dieu-homme. etc... Les êtres vivants, animés, cultivés deviennent du masculin; les objets privés de vie, inanimés, incultes deviennent du féminin. Cela veut dire que les hommes se sont attribué et ont réduit les femmes au statut d'objet ou à rien.[49]

Although the distinction between masculine and feminine rarely applies to English nouns, it is nevertheless interesting to note that with the use of the pronoun 'they', the feminine is not differentiated from the masculine, which is a process that ought to work as a logical deduction since 'she' and 'he' are two different pronouns.

Thirdly, women end up being limited to materiality to which they may be confined, symbolically and practically, although they are still not in control.

> Les phrases des femmes, plus riches en détermination concrètes et spécifiques, témoignent d'un rapport à la réalité contextuelle que pourtant celles-ci n'organisent ni ne possèdent en propre. Comme si les

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[48] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)p.86.

[49] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)p.87.

> femmes étaient plus proches de l'expérience du réel, mais laissaient à l'autre, l'homme, la tâche de le structurer, en évitant, elles, de s'y inscrire pleinement comme sujets de l'expérience, même là où cette expérience est le plus typiquement la leur.[50]

This does not seem to be the case for men:

> Les hommes endossent fréquemment la position du sujet qui parle... Leur relation au monde, à l'autre, est subjective, mais abstraite, vague quant au temps et à l'espace, assez peu différenciés: les hommes utilisent beaucoup moins que les femmes des adjectifs pour désigner les qualités distinctives de phénomènes sociaux et naturels.[51]

Men do assert their capacity as agents. They inscribe their subjectivity in society and the world by appropriating all powers, including the right to objectify women in their discourse whilst they always secure their position as subjects:

> En analysant les fragments de discours, j'ai pu constater que les deux sexes ne parlent pas le même langage et n'obéissent pas aux mêmes contraintes linguistiques. Hommes et femmes sont apparemment unis mais, en même temps, hommes et femmes ne se parlent pas et ne peuvent se parler comme sujets autonomes. L'un des deux sexes a le pôle subjectif du discours, par exemple, et l'autre le pôle objectal... L'un des deux sexes privilégie le rapport entre sujet et objet, et l'autre entre sujets... L'un des deux sexes privilégie le rapport entre sujet et objet, et l'autre entre sujets.[52]

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[50] Patrizia Violi, 'Subjectivité et Genres dans la Sémantique du Verbe:Voir', in *Sexes et Genres à Travers les Langues: Eléments de Communication Sexuée*, ed. by Luce Irigaray (Paris:Grasset,1990)pp.83-115,(p.109). Patrizia Violi used Italian for her study.

[51] Paula Ecimovic, 'Etude Comparative sur la Différentiation Sexuelle', in *Sexes et Genres à travers les Langues: Eléments de Communication Sexuée*, ed. by Luce Irigaray (Paris:Grasset,1990), pp.261-283(p.282). Paula Ecimovic used English for her study.

[52] Margaret Dempster, 'Usage Sexué des pronoms', in *Sexes et Genres à travers les Langues: Eléments de Communication Sexuée*, ed. by Luce Irigaray (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.357-385(pp.381-382). Margaret Dempster used English for her study.

> Pour les hommes, il s'agit surtout de destituer le féminin de sa position de sujet afin d'inscrire une subjectivité proprement masculine, serait-ce implicitement ou indirectement.[53]

Language still aims to preserve hierarchichal divisions between men and women, despite equal opportunity policies and political correctness. One good example illustrating this point is the inequality between women and men which still exists, especially at work.[54]

> Une idéologie sexiste, le plus souvent inconsciente, pèse donc sur l'économie au sens strict. Elle est véhiculée par du language... Ce sont les schémas sociaux de division du travail qui continuent à s'exercer sous un économisme apparemment pur. Au femmes le travail de reproduction et le travail domestique impayés, aux hommes le travail de production rémunéré, sont des catégories encore à l'oeuvre sous d'apparentes ou partielles évolutions sociales.[55]

Women have had to mimic what dominant discourse considers to be neutral language, in order to express themselves. Irigaray argues that the female speaker can absorb the dominant discourse without having the real

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[53] Patrizia Violi, 'Subjectivité et Genres dans la Sémantique du Verbe:Voir', in *Sexes et Genres à Travers les Langues: Eléments de Communication Sexuée*, ed. by Luce Irigaray (Paris:Grasset,1990)pp.83-115,(p.109). Patrizian Violi used Itialian for her study.

[54] "Le droit à l'égalité professionnelle (loi de 1983) n'est pas appliqué. Les écarts des salaires entre les hommes et les femmes occupant un emploi équivalent sont de 24%". Lucienne Mardore, 'Féminisme, la Nouvelle Vague',*Marie-Claire*, 523(1996),47-54(p.54). See chapter Three for more details on this subject.

[55] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.145-146.

opportunity of retorting with her own words, in her own way. The female speaker mimics it in order to be accepted and to share the authority language confers so that she can defend herself against invisibility or subjugation.

This point can be demonstrated by looking at Anglo-Saxon and German speakers when they express the idea of possession. Irigaray states that the gender of these speakers is expressed when related to possession. For example, one says 'his son' or 'her son'.[56] Both speakers are then placed in a situation of equality in relation to the object or the person which is possessed, since the mark of the possessor does not depend, as is the case in Romance languages, on the object but on the possessor. According to the philosopher, a system of possession leaves no room for distinction between subjects. It works as a seemingly unifying process which, in reality, subsumes differences and therefore modes of domination.

However, when equality between men and women is based on a principle of possession, '*l'avoir*', whatever it may be, equality is not really acquired, as possessing something does not mean that the female speaker can legitimize her presence as a '*Je*' in her own right who can

[56] It may be worth noting that in French, there are several examples such as the expression 'son enfant', where the noun, here 'enfant', is masculine although referring to a male or a female child, thus not indicating the mark of the feminine.

have a hold over the world.

> Selon Katherine Stephenson, Mark Calkins et Katy Swendson, les femmes américaines disent plus *je* que les femmes françaises ou italiennes. Mais il n'est pas évident que ce *je* - y compris écrit - des femmes de langue anglaise témoigne d'une plus grande capacité à une identité sexuée. Cela manifeste une aptitude à s'affirmer comme *je*, une habitude à le faire... Mais que dit ou que fait ce *je*? ... Il n'est pas indifférent, selon moi, que les femmes de culture anglo-saxonne dont la marque du genre s'exprime dans le posséssif... s'affirment plus comme *je* mais ce *je* est entre autres, un effet de la possession de l'objet comme sien. Ce *je* n'est donc pas dénoté ou connoté comme sujet, en particulier, sexué... ce *je* reste, comme celui des femmes françaises ou italiennes, dans la soumission au regard de l'autre, dans le désistement de sa parole, de son action, de son choix, de son désir au bénéfice de l'autre, généralement homme.[57]

2.1.3. Implementation of new linguistic practices.

The second point made by the philosopher is that women have the potential to subvert the existing language by creating new linguistic practices. This potential is like a source of energy which is restrained by women as they have not had a symbolic space from which to speak. Symbolically they are not recognized as subjects of enunciation. "Pourquoi leur potentiel énergétique de langage est-il toujours en point de fuite, faute d'un

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[57] Luce Irigaray, 'Conclusions', in *Sexes et Genres à travers les Langues: Eléments de Communication Sexuée*, ed. by Luce Irigaray (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.389-461(p.393). The names mentioned at the beginning of this quote are the names of researchers who have worked for Irigaray's project.

retour possible au sujet d'énonciation?"[58] What is needed, according to Irigaray, is equal rights between male and female speaking subjects: "Subjectifs implique des droits équivalents dans les systèmes d'échange".[59]

Therefore, a space has to be rebuilt in the symbolic, within the conditions of enunciation, and within the very structures of language. This process of reconstruction can be envisaged since, according to Irigaray, the speaking subject has the latent but unrealized capacity to make her voice heard. This is what Irigaray calls *'le potentiel de non-dit'*, corresponding to a lack of being, *'le non-être'*, which is in itself, a potential of subversion to be understood, I would suggest, as a latent power waiting to be capitalized upon. This can be explained by the fact that the female subject cannot legitimately express her specificity. The female speaking subject can subvert the dominant discourse if she extricates herself from the model to which she is predestined; that of the reverse or the inverted copy of the male speaking subject.[60]

Irigaray describes the dominant discourse as a power

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[58] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.318-319.

[59] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.84.

[60] The notion of inversion or reversal refers to Lacan's theory of the visible which has been explained and discussed in chapter one.

which works as a closed system in which women are trapped since, at first, there seems to be no possibility of escaping the established order and of generating change.

> [...] si les femmes sont maintenues dans un langage potentiel, elles constituent une réserve énergétique qui peut s'abolir ou exploser à défaut de formes possibles d'expression. Si elles ne représentent que l'envers ou le revers (en symétrie spéculaire?) du discours, elles bouclent celui-ci sur lui-même.[61]

Following Irigaray's interpretation, taking refuge in the irremediable fixity of a system, is also hiding from reality. In other words, if women's ability to modify the dominant order of language is denied or ignored because their position as legitimate speaking subjects cannot be accepted by the male economy, evolution or, at least, adjustment of patriarchal discourse will never take place. Continuing to ignore the legitimacy of women as speaking subjects can only result in making the need for change more apparent.

On the other hand, Irigaray also declares that if the female subject adopts the language of the dominant discourse, she still cannot have a real impact on it as she does not have the symbolic, social or political status required to impose herself as a legitimate speaker who has the power to name. In Bourdieusian terms, she cannot benefit from the credibility an official representative of

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[61] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.318.

dominant power, '*un porte-parole*' automatically enjoys.

> Contraintes à une mimétique défensive ou offensive, elles [les femmes] risquent d'absorber le sens du discours en l'effondrant par défaut de réponse possible. Elles interceptent, alors, la finalité ou l'intentionalité du discours, ce qui accélère un processus de destructuration acceptable si un nouveau langage peu avoir lieu.[62]

Either way, it would seem, following Irigaray's reasoning, that the meaning and function of the dominant discourse may fail since it does not allow real challenges. It allows some modification, such as additions of terms expressing the potential roles of female speakers in society, but only as a way of coopting or taking over these terms in its own system and of limiting what women can do. As mentioned previously, using she/he to represent the identities of the speakers is still not giving the female speaker the power to name.

To counteract these problems, Irigaray states that making women aware of their self as speaking subjects is essential. The 'I', in that case, should refer to 'she', thus proving the existence and the potential power of female speakers as a group, 'genre'. According to the philosopher, the female '*Je*' can and should be her self referent instead of searching for the proof of her existence through the other, being mostly a male referent,

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[62] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre*, (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.318.

or through 'you', directly linked to 'he', or to her child or some other person dependent on her.

One point Irigaray always comes back to is the lack of direct transition between 'you', '*tu*', 'she', '*elle*' and the female 'I', '*Je*', which can be explained by a sense of loss of female identity. The philosopher argues that this can be partly interpreted by the erasure of the maternal 'I', corresponding to the feminine 'I' as a subject of discourse.

> Pour les hommes, le *tu*, originellement maternel-féminin, se perd au bénéfice du *il*. C'est la transition entre *tu-elle-tu* qui manque dans le langage. Cela correspond à l'économie syntaxique des discours analysés et aux conclusions sur notre ordre linguistique où s'efface le *tu* maternel et le *je* féminin. Cet ordre n'est pas arbitraire mais motivé par des lois qui ont échappé aux linguistes.[63]

Here, again, Irigaray returns to the idea of the symbolic mother representing meaning and a different order of language. Instead of forcing the child to renounce the mother in order to enter the Law of the Father, she claims that the meaning of mothertongue, '*la langue maternelle*', corresponding to the acknowledgment of the symbolic role of the mother regarding the entry of the child into language, should be revalidated. In that case, negating the mother, '*le meurtre de la mère*', would not be possible as the presence of the mother would become unavoidable as would her role as the child's direct interlocutor making

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[63] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.41-42.

her identity as a speaking subject legitimate. Irigaray's argument, in this context, works as the straight answer to Freud's theory of the *fort-da*. She uses that example to emphasize the fact that the mother is absent as an interlocutor:

> Ce "jeu" dit du *fort-da*, y compris avec ses alternances de voyelles (o-a), marquerait l'entrée de l'enfant dans la possibilité de la distanciation symbolique. Cela aurait lieu par l'assimilation de la mère à un objet tenu par un fil grâce auquel la distance à elle serait dominée ou annulée par l'enfant-garçon (Freud n'émettant pas l'hypothèse de ce qu'il en serait pour la fille)... Ce praticable, décrit par Freud, suppose l'absence de la mère comme interlocutrice, la présence du grand-père comme observateur et régulateur d'un langage "normal".
>
> Quels gestes et quels restes du langage, notamment entre l'enfant et la mère, la mère et l'enfant, sont-ils ainsi laissés hors d'un discours acceptable? Ce hors-lieu du dit,... n'entraîne-t-il pas la systématicité ... du discours prétendu recevable, un praticable d'échanges entre mère et fils, mère et sujet-homme, n'étant pas mis en place dans la langue.[64]

Denying the mother the right to act as a legitimate interlocutor for the child, corresponds to negating a part of one's own identity and culture. By extension it is also a way of silencing women as a 'genre', and therefore, of disregarding the potential specificity of linguistic practices used between female speakers.

For the philosopher, the link between the 'I' and the 'she' situated in relation to 'they', '*elles*', also

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[64] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.321-322.

represents an association between two or more female speakers who communicate as female speaking subjects. This sort of linguistic transaction is part of what Irigaray calls intersubjectivity which is a linguistic exchange between speakers who acknowledge their presence as legitimate 'I' takes place. This presupposes that the 'I' expressing her existence as subject is again contextualized by 'her', or 'they', '*elles*', acting as self referents. The idea, here, is to posit the female speaker in relation to womankind and to avoid the unconscious reference to '*tu*' being 'he' or 'they', '*ils*', implicitly imposing the presence of a supposedly universal '*on*', that is to say, Man.

In conclusion, the dominant discourse does not offer women the chance to voice their specificity as speaking subjects. Neither does it enable the male subject to question his position as a speaking subject to see, for example, if there is not a part of himself he has to negate in order to correspond to the imposed model of subjectivity.

According to Irigaray, making discourse evolve is women's responsibility until the female speaker is recognized as legitimate speaking subject. Attempting to reformulate a space from which language can be re-structured amounts to changing the conditions of

enunciation. Nevertheless, the philosopher still wonders if what she calls a transformation of language is really possible:

> La question se pose de savoir si le langage des femmes utilise(rait) un potentiel de sens non encore réalisé, restant dans la même économie générale du discours, ou si ce qu'elles pensent et peuvent dire oblige à une mutation de l'horizon de la langue.[65]

However, the important point made by the philosopher is that language should be used to give sexual difference a cultural status guaranteeing equality between male and female speaking subjects. If language could be used by women and men to achieve this aim, it would mean that sexual difference could be understood as a mark of difference within equality and not as a pathology:

> La question est donc de savoir si nos civilisations sont encore prêtes à considérer le sexe comme une pathologie, une tare, un résidu d'animalité ou si elle sont enfin assez adultes pour lui donner son statut culturel humain. Cette mutation passe par l'évolution de la dimension sexuée de la langue et de tous les moyens d'échange.[66]

By claiming the right to express the specificity of the speaking subject, Irigaray wants to restructure discourse to establish symmetry between the male and the female speaking subjects through language. Changing linguistic practices, according to the philosopher's recommendation,

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[65] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985)p.318.

[66] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.44.

amounts to implementing a female genealogy by bringing new modes of awareness based on respect for the female speaker as a female speaking subject. As regards the implementation of the sensible transcendental through language, I would suggest that the symbolic presence of the female speaker is legitimized by the place she occupies in discourse. The utterance of the female speaking subject, corroborated by her belonging to a female genealogy, becomes performative since the female 'I' can posit herself as, in Irigarian terms, '*Je=>elle*', '*Je=>elles*', or '*Je=>tu=>elle* or *=>elles*', thus indicating the autonomous and unavoidable existence of the female speaker, firstly as an individual subject and secondly, as a 'genre'.[67]

[67] The arrows between various pronouns correspond to Irigaray's presentation of these pronouns. The arrows indicate the unmediated relation of one speaker to another, marking the intersubjective nature of their exchange.

2.2. Application of Sexual Difference as a cultural practice in society.

According to Irigaray, a symbolic space specific to female genealogy cannot exist without cultural practices materializing female subjectivity in society. In this part of the debate, Irigaray's project for a female genealogy is interpreted as a practice based on the realization of the female subject as an individual.

Irigaray's outline of female genealogy has some similarities with *affidamento* although the philosopher does not use this term in relation to her own work.[68] She uses either the notion of 'well-being', or '*aise*', expressing the possibility for women of being themselves as uncompromising female subjects in society. She also uses the term 'horizon', which is a perspective shared by women on the ethics and, in my opinion, political implementation of a female genealogy in society.

A women's movement, in Italy, produced a pamphlet published in *Sottosopra vert*, 'Upside down', entitled, '*Piu donne che uomini*', 'More women than men', in 1983. *Sottosopra* is a publication produced by the Milan Bookstore which is the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. They have also published a book called *Sexual Difference: a theory of social symbolic practice* in 1987, translated into

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[68] The definition of *affidamento* is given in note 69,p.132.

English in 1990. This group has been working on a project based on the application of Sexual Difference as a political and cultural practice in society. The group has been inspired by Luce Irigaray's work on the role of sexual difference in the symbolic. It has defined *affidamento* as follows:

> [...] entrustment, [*affidamento*], a term proposed to designate a relationship between two women which, though recorded and variously accounted for in feminist and women's writing, had not yet been named or formally addressed in feminist theory. Briefly, the relationship of entrustment is one in which one woman gives her trust or entrusts herself symbolically to another woman, thus becomes her guide, mentor, or point of reference, in short, the figure of symbolic mediation between her and the world. Both women engage in the relationship, ... and the most controversial aspect of this feminist theory of practice - not in spite but rather because and in full recognition of the disparity that may exist between them in class, social position, age, level of education, professional status, income, etc [...].[69]

This definition will be discussed in relation to the cultural practices Irigaray proposes to materialize female genealogy.

The philosopher claims that women's well-being in society, '*l'aise*', should correspond to a sense of freedom secured by women's awareness of their belonging to a legitimate group, 'une liberté enracinée dans l'identité de mon genre'. If this way of liberating women was to be adopted, it would have to work as the postulate on which

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[69]The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference:A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice* (Bloomington & Indianapolis:Indiana University Press),pp.8-9.

women would base socio-cultural practices materializing female genealogy in society.

> Les femmes ne peuvent être à l'aise sans mutations... des systèmes de représentations parce qu'ils sont appropriés à la subjectivité des hommes, à "l'aise" de l'entre-hommes...les femmes ne peuvent obtenir l'aise sociale sans changements des moyens culturels que sont la langue et les images.[70]

This affirmation seems to fall in line with the overall politics of *affidamento* as mentioned by Luisa Muraro when she was interviewed by Irigaray. During their conversation, they refer to cultural practices used by women in order to reach a state of well-being, *'l'aise'*, and the benefits which should be attached to it in society:

> L'aise, l'être au monde avec aise, au sens que lui donne *Sottosopra vert*, veut dire: être au monde, non plus en étrangères ou en servantes, mais en tant que femmes (*donne, dominae*: dames, maîtresses) chez elles et en elles-mêmes. Pour arriver à cette maîtrise, sans la fonder sur des moyens de domination comme l'argent ou les armes, des changements, surtout au niveau symbolique, sont nécessaires, comme tu l'as souligné.[71]

What really matters, for the Milan Women's Collective as for Muraro and Irigaray, is to make women aware of their potential, as women, symbolically, culturally and therefore politically. The assertion of sexual difference through the shaping of a female genealogy, understood here as a culture of female sociality, represents the way to emancipation. This process starts with the realization

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[70]Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p.120.

[71] Luisa Muraro in her interview with Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p.121.

that enfranchisement starts at the level of the female individual.

2.2.1. The individual female subject and female genealogy.

It would seem that for Irigaray, the first step in the construction of a female genealogy depends on the fact that the female subject, as an individual, must become aware of being part of 'le genre féminin', womankind. The very principle of womankind is based, again, on the symbolic figure which is central to Irigaray's work: the mother. In this part of the chapter, 'the mother' is analysed in relation to her role in the socio-cultural order rather than in terms of her function in the symbolic.

> Pour obtenir un statut subjectif équivalent à celui des hommes, les femmes doivent donc faire reconnaître leur différence. Elles doivent s'affirmer comme sujets valables, filles de mères et de pères, respectueuses de l'autre entre elles et exigeant de la société le même respect. Mais tout le cadre de leur identité est à reconstruire... la femme ...est rejetée comme sujet femme et la fille inégalement reconnue comme sujet-fille. Les valeurs qui dominent nos civilisations sont celles qui manifestent visiblement leur appartenance au genre masculin.[72]

According to Irigaray, daughters and women, are always identified in relation to their father, whose name they usually have until they acquire the name of their husband.[73] This fact is characteristic of the imperialism

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[72]Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.57.

[73] Although it is now possible in most European countries to keep the mother's name when or if married, it is still not common practice and generates lengthy administrative procedures.

of patriarchal order. What Irigaray wishes to demonstrate here is that the erasure of women as subjects from the symbolic order is reproduced by social rules. She argues that although men are very much part of women's life, as, for instance, women give birth to males, men do not respect women as legitimate subjects and, consequently, I would argue, as citizens in their own right.[74]

> [...] la culture ... Aveuglément ... a vénéré jusqu'au fétichisme religieux le rapport mère-fils mais elle n'a pas interprété le modèle de tolérance de l'autre en soi et avec soi... Là où le corps féminin engendre dans le respect de la différence, le corps social patriarchal se bâtit hiérarchiquement en excluant la différence... l'enfant fille, bien que conçue par homme et femme, n'est pas admise dans la société comme enfant du père au même titre que le fils.[75]

In order to mark women's sense of belonging to a female genealogy, 'la fille est fille de mère', the links between mothers and daughters must be reconstructed as indispensable components of socio-cultural order. This relationship is at the basis of the whole process of development of female individuality. Specific cultural practices must be instituted to rehabilitate women's symbolic and social rights. Only then could women become aware of the fact that mothers, be they symbolic mothers, their parent, themselves as potential mothers, or even

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[74] The relationship of the female subject in the symbolic and women as citizens is discussed in detail in chapter Three.

[75] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.56-57.

their mentor, have a crucial role to play in the shaping of their identity and the ruling of society.

Becoming aware of the existence of the mother as a powerful individual also means that women can respect their female self as a legitimate being responsible for the creation of a space where they can set up intersubjective relationships, unmediated by the Law of the Father, and, therefore, by patriarchal imperatives.

In a chapter entitled 'La culture de la différence', Irigaray makes the following series of recommendations which may appear controversial, if they are compared to current feminist concerns, unless they are replaced in the more general context of her work. She proposes, for example, that positive representations of mothers and daughters be displayed in public places in order to project the symbolic meaning of this association:

> Dans toute maison et tout lieu public, il convient de disposer de belles images (non publicitaires) du couple mère-fille. Il est très pathogène pour les filles d'être toujours face aux représentations mère -fils, notamment dans la tradition chrétienne.[76]

The interesting point here, is that the philosopher wants to produce images of daughters and mothers in a relationship between women which is part of a female culture, but not of a cultural inheritance irremediably

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[76] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.58.

linked to reproduction and material or moral duty, which is the type of relationship where mother and daughter always end up being caught in the traditional system of representation.

It is clear that Irigaray firmly intends to posit women's autonomy as one of the main components of female genealogy. Autonomy, here, has to be understood as the possibility for mother and daughter of positing themselves as separate female speaking subjects. Autonomy also means that they can both free themselves from the demands made by the male economy.

The philosopher proposes to use specific forms of language enabling mother and daughter to rethink the nature of their relationship:

> Je propose aux mères de susciter des occasions d'employer avec leur(s) fille(s) le pluriel féminin. Elles pourraient aussi inventer des mots et des phrases pour désigner des réalités qu'elles éprouvent et partagent mais pour lesquelles elles manquent de langage.[77]

This statement takes us back to Irigaray's emphasis on the link which should be made automatically between the female 'I' and the referents 'she', '*elle*', or 'they', '*elles*', representing mother and daughter as female speaking subjects involved in a rapport of intersubjecivity and not of dependence, be it maternal or filial. For mother and

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[77] Luce Irigaray, *Je.Tu.Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.58

daughter to become aware that they are independent of each other is empowering because it works as a mark of recognition for each other as women. "[...] la mère-femme s'adresse à la fille-femme... elle parle d'elle-même et invite sa fille à le faire... elle évoque sa généalogie".[78]

On the other hand, the practice of autonomous relations also reinforces the idea that there can be a space between mother and daughter which is not marked by hierarchy but by the desire to respect each other as subjects, just as the male speaking subject should respect the female speaking subject:

> Il serait utile que les mères apprennent très tôt aux filles le respect de la différence non hierarchique des sexes: *il*, c'est *il*, *elle* c'est *elle*. *Il* et *elle* ne se réduisent pas à des fonctions complémentaires mais correspondent à des identités différentes. Femmes et hommes, pères et mères, filles et garçons ont des formes et qualités différentes. Ils ne peuvent être identifiés seulement par des actions ni des rôles.[79]

Being posited as two distinct individuals also means that mother and daughter can become the active makers of their relationship instead of falling automatically into the roles of provider/nurturer for the mother, and dutiful receiver for the daughter. This point has been developed

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[78] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.59.

[79] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une CXulture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.59.

by other feminist theorists such as Janneke van Mens-Verhulst in a chapter entitled 'Beyond daughtering and mothering'. She argues that daughters must form their own female identity as the result of an interaction with the mother. Interaction, here, can be equated with intersubjectivity in Irigarian terms. This means that daughters do not passively become educated by mothers. Daughters and mothers have to work at becoming subjects through different experiences due to generational shifts; they have to learn from each other. They are no longer bound by a relational paradigm to which they are both confined.[80] Following Irigaray's thought, it could be said that the mother is not a subject because she is a mother. She becomes a subject, as a woman, and hence, a maker of female genealogy by engaging in intersubjective communication with her daughter. This process works in the same way for the daughter. Whether daughter and mother welcome or resist this interaction is, in a way, irrelevant. What matters is the fact they are mutually constructing their female self through an active association they are responsible for, thus acquiring self-confidence and autonomy. At this stage, they both seem to learn to generate a language and method of entrustment at an individual level and within a special relationship. It could be said that this phase of initiation should work as

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[80] *Daughtering and Mothering:Female Subjectivity Reanalysed.* Ed. by J. van Mens-Verhulst, K. Schreurs & L. Woertman (London:Routledge,1993),pp.159-160.

the first experience preparing them for the development of cultural practices capable of implementing female genealogy in society.

2.3. Female genealogy and cultural practice of *'l'entre-femmes'*.

> Et comment gérer le monde en tant que femme si nous n'avons pas défini notre identité, les règles concernant nos rapports généalogiques, notre ordre social, linguistique, culturel?[81]

Irigaray answers this problem by proposing to use culture as a means of production to encourage practices capable of securing rights, new modes of women's representation, female sociality, and finally, a status guaranteeing women's autonomy and legitimate authority.

I will argue that all these elements which do recur in Irigaray's work, with different meanings, all revolve around one crucial point of reference, female genealogy. Their purpose is to make the presence of the female subject unavoidably visible in society.

2.3.1. The notion of rights.

Irigaray talks about justice when she refers to the need to acquire equal rights and opportunities for women. This point is discussed in detail in chapter Three.

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[81] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.69-70.

The notion of rights can also mean the power to recognize and legitimize sexual difference which, according to her, should operate as a point of convergence between nature and culture. Within the context of this discussion, Sexual Difference can be interpreted as a set of values specific to the role of the female subject in society. In other words, social justice for women cannot be obtained without cultural changes relevant to a legitimate female genealogy:

> [...] notre besoin est d'abord, celui d'un droit à la dignité humaine pour tout le monde...Une justice sociale, notamment sexuelle, ne peut se réaliser sans changement des lois de la langue et des conceptions des vérités et valeurs organisant l'ordre social. La modification des instruments culturels est aussi nécessaire à moyen ou long terme qu'une répartition des biens strictement matériels.[82]

Throughout her work, Irigaray repeats that it is women's role to instigate these changes. Therefore, their duty, in this domain, is to act as a homogenous group fighting for the rights and practices inherent in female genealogy.

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[82] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), p.25.

2.3.2. 'Well-being', *'l'aise'*, and representation.

Well-being, 'l'aise', is an element women must attempt to implement, by modifying modes of representation of women in society at large. For Irigaray, cultural changes women create can act as intermediate measures designed to reduce or even erase inequalities between men and women. Being involved, as members of a specific group committed to reach the same aims can also act as a form of catalyst for women, thus possibly helping them to overcome their differences, although this particular point is not specifically mentioned by Irigaray.

> Les femmes ne peuvent pas être à l'aise sans mutations ... des systèmes de représentations parce qu'ils sont appropriés à ... "l"aise" de l'entre-hommes... Pour que les femmes soient respectées par la société mais aussi pour qu'elles se respectent entre elles, il est nécessaire que les contextes linguistiques et représentatifs leur donnent des médiations et des droits subjectifs équivalents à ceux des hommes.[83]

Consequently, Irigaray encourages women to generate new modes of representation of female identity in order to change or counterbalance the way women are portrayed in the media or in advertising. This view is endorsed by all feminists who find these images unacceptable since they are produced for the male gaze and respond to commercial demands. They do not represent women as independent, powerful individuals, even when images of the 20th century superwoman are on the covers of many magazines. It is

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[83] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.120.

a fact that the superwoman is always middle-class, white, happily married with children and thus far from the reality of most women's lives. Besides, the superwoman still corresponds to stereotypes of feminity and woman's traditional roles. Few women are really in positions of power compared with men. If women are in positions of authority, they are often used as token images of success rather than as models representing influential women in their own right. This is why Irigaray stresses the need for more positive images in important places so that women, at large, can have a sense of belonging to a female genealogy. It could be argued, of course, that not all women who are or have been in a position of authority can be a role model for other women whose interest they should defend. This certainly was not the case for Margaret Thatcher, for instance, who acted like a man between other men when it was needed in her position as a Prime Minister, and who became a woman again when she wanted to embody the model of the Tory woman: the housewife.[84] As a result, she ended up behaving more like a man since it was the role which was expected of her as a leading political figure.

In Irigarian terms, Margaret Thatcher would represent the neutral woman the philosopher denounces as being disempowering for other women. For Irigaray, a female role

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[84] Point made by Beatrix Campbell throughout her book, Beatrix Campbell, *The Iron Ladies: Why do women vote Tory?* (London:Virago,1987).

model is a woman who clearly posits herself as a specifically female subject who works towards cultural changes generating equality with men, within the respect of Sexual Difference:

> La plupart des femmes se vivent, au niveau de la culture, d'abord comme assexuées ou neutres, à part la soumission aux normes de la scène sexuelle au sens strict et aux stéréotypes familiaux. Les difficultés qu'elles rencontrent pour entrer dans le monde culturel de l'entre-hommes entraînent le fait, que presque toutes... renoncent à leur subjectivité féminine et aux rapports avec leurs semblables, ce qui les conduit à une impasse individuelle et collective du point de vue de la communication. Cela appauvrit aussi considérablement la culture, réduite à un seul pôle d'identité sexué.[85]

Following Irigaray's reasoning, it is not unreasonable to think that women could resist pressure from the dominant discourse if they really considered themselves to be part of a legitimate group which would have some authority as such in society. In other words, female genealogy would act as a catalytic power for women's collective action. It would give women the possibility of asserting themselves as members of a 'genre' capable of generating its own discourse and of defending its specific rights and needs.

However efficient this form of rallying may be in certain circumstances, a problem remains, that of differences between women. This particular point will be discussed in more detail, in the last part of this

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[85] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.24.

analysis.

2.3.3. 'Womankind'.

> Cette société exclut l'entre-femmes, sépare les femmes les unes des autres et ne connaît donc pas une culture féminine... Dans une telle culture, il est normal, ou du moins compréhensible, que les modèles d'identité féminine n'existent pas. Cette civilisation n'a ni philosophie ni linguistique, ni religion ni politique féminines. Toutes ces disciplines sont adaptées à un sujet masculin.[86]

What women need to do is to develop intersubjective systems of exchange between themselves which would function like a dialectic in order to posit female genealogy in society. This would enable them to materialize the symbolic love and respect for their own group, 'leur genre', legitimized by the very existence of a female genealogy. The issue, in this argument, is that the common point between women is not based on their mothering potential, but above all, around the idea that women should organize themselves as a human kind, womankind. Its strength should be the setting up of socio-cultural representations corresponding to the symbolic power of female genealogy. Constructing a female genealogy amounts to reconstituting women's history, and this time, on their own terms, with their own language, their own set of values, and in relation to cultural practices directly linked to their own rights in society.

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[86] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),p.79.

To pursue this aim, the use of the female 'I' contextualized by 'you' as 'she', or 'they', '*elles*', is indispensable. The redefinition of the female speaking subject as an 'I' empowered by her belonging to a community of female subjects, implies that women share the same perspective, at least, globally. The practice of the female 'I', in the context of this debate, is therefore, a decisive element in a dialectical process between women which should be taught by older women to the younger female generations, following the mother-daughter model recommended by Irigaray.[87]

From a pragmatic point of view, it would mean that 'she' has to represent an active subject who acts as an autonomous female speaker, and who has a legitimate power of decision in society.

In a study on the use of language carried out by Irigaray and some members of her team, 500 people were asked to make sentences revolving around a given corpus. People questioned included males and females from various social classes and ethnic groups living either in Paris or in French provinces. University students and assistants working at the International College of Philosophy where Irigaray was teaching were also questioned. The following

[87] In this part of the chapter, the role of the female 'I' is specifically discussed with regard to its practical interaction with other female speakers.

conclusions were drawn:

> Avec les consignes induisant *elle* comme sujet, et même *elle-se* - par exemple la consigne "Faites une phrase avec les mots: robe-se-voir" - les réponses manifestent:
>
> b) L'évitement du *elle se*
> c) L'évitement du *elles se*."
> "Pour la consigne *elle(s) s'aime(nt)* les réponses sont différentes:... - si la réponse indique une relation entre deux femmes, celle-ci est souvent connotée négativement, surtout par les hommes: elles s'aiment les lesbiennes, elles s'aiment les salopes... - de la part des femmes, un pourcentage assez faible indique une relation familiale, entre mère et fille... - certains échantillons de femmes donnent un pourcentage relativement important de réponse signifiant plus ou moins explicitement: elles s'apprécient mutuellement, et même: elle s'apprécie elle-même.[88]

Irigaray also explains that the pronoun 'they', '*elles*' is devalued by comparison with 'they', '*ils*', by men and women alike, which is particularly surprising as far as women are concerned. This way of privileging the male speaking subject, be he present or absent, starts as soon as the child, male or female, can engage in a conversation.

> [...] dès l'entrée dans le monde patriarcal... le[*tu* / *elle*
> ou le *Tu* / *elle* s'adressant à la mère, vont se transformer
> en *tu* / *il* et surtout
> *Tu* / *il*, les hommes assurant la représentation autoritaire de l'ordre de la parole, de la culture. Ces changements de genre et de nature du partenaire du discours... au moment du passage à la multiplicité possible des *tu*- vont réduire l'identité féminine de la fille. Comme personnes assurant l'ordre de la

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[88] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),pp. 119-123.

> parole et de la culture ne restent que des sujets masculins... et un sujet féminin dépersonnalisé, impersonnalisé.[89]

Irigaray claims that it is the role of women to act as independent subjects within and outside female genealogy in order to instigate cultural evolution, 'une mutation culturelle'. This means that women can act as mediators between the symbolic representation of a female genealogy and the application of its cultural practices in society. Acting as a mediator means that female identity and culture can be shaped by women who no longer have to resort to the male economy to perceive, understand, and organize their lives as female subjects.

2.3.4. Women as mediators

As a practice relevant to *affidamento,* a system of support, guidance or mentoring, can take place between two women, or be extended to a group of women. This enables younger women or women who decide to join such a group to benefit from the experience and knowledge of women who have had a long involvement with this procedure. Various women's groups have already adopted similar practices although they may not follow exactly the same methods. There are women-only groups in the labour party, Women in Parliament which is a cross party group in the UK, women's

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[89] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),pp.125-126.

research groups in universities, as well as several women-only groups in many communities, who endeavour to fight for or attempt to acquire more rights at an individual or local level. In these groups, women can assist each other and organize selective action. The difference with Irigaray's principles of sociality between women or with *affidamento* seems to be though, that the politics of Sexual Difference does not play a major role in these groups.

Although relations of entrustment and support between women are still being developed and should certainly be encouraged, some reservations have been expressed regarding the practice of *affidamento*. Certain points have been raised by Irigaray during an interview with Franca Chiaromonte, in 1985, an Italian Journalist working for *Rinascita*, the Communist Party journal of culture:

> In *Affidamento* (insofar as I have any clear understanding of what is involved), there is always the possibility of uncontrollably hierarchical relations, and their reversal ('senior' becomes 'junior' in various senses)... Given the importance of the task, there is indeed a great risk that women will encroach on one another's territory, even involuntarily.[90]

The problem of hierarchy may seem unavoidable as it exists in most relationships, especially when the mentor, for example, has more knowledge in a specific area than the person seeking support or advice. However, it does not

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[90]*The Irigaray Reader: Luce Irigaray*, Ed. M. Whitford (London:Routledge,1991),pp.194-195. The interview is translated in English by David Macey.

necessarily mean that exchanges between women have to be marked by domination. Both subjects can learn from each other, as I have already argued regarding the mother-daughter relationship. As suggested by Irigaray, perhaps with some regret, the 'senior' can become the 'junior', and that in itself can be enriching. Theoretically and ideally, the aim of relationships of exchange between female subjects, as described by Irigaray or by the women involved with *affidamento*, is to get out of the system of power relations characterizing the male economy. If it is true that hierarchy and the power attached to it also exist between women, one valid explanation is indeed that women have to fight and work very hard for what they endeavour to obtain, since the patriarchal system reinforced by capitalist order makes it very difficult for them to be on an equal footing with men and/or with each other. The omnipresent sense of competition inherent in our culture, nowadays, also reinforces hierarchical relations between women as well as between women and men.

Another problem Irigaray raises in relation to *affidamento* is the difficulty in extending this type of interrelation from a small nucleus, such as two women, or what she calls a 'little cell', to a group:

> What type of relationship will be created between the *one* woman who creates a cultural work and women who are bound together by *affidamento*? It is a difficult question, as it involves the transition from contiguity to another figure. There is a qualitative threshold at which it is not only a matter of

> accepting the differences between us (a considerable achievement in itself), but of constituting another relationship.[91]

Several interesting points are made here. Firstly, if she admits that several women can be bound together in *affidamento*, it would seem to prove that such a grouping can function satisfactorily. One possibility could be the example of the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective which has been inspired by her work and which has adapted it, or parts of it, to its own needs. Such a procedure is possible for different groups or approaches even if it means that a 'cultural work' is not unconditionally accepted in its entirety.[92] It would seem that one of the most constructive points of a relationship such as *affidamento* is precisely the flexibility of its participants and their openness to different roles and understanding of the practice of entrustment.

In the statement quoted above, Irigaray also referred to differences between women. The philosopher very rarely mentions this important factor which is very often the cause of the splitting of women's groups or of their theoretical or political division in certain cases. This has been proved in the past, regarding dissensions between

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[91] *The Irigaray Reader:Luce Irigaray*, Ed. Margaret Whitford (London:Routledge,1991)pp.194-195.

[92]In chapters Three and Four, I have tried to suggest ways in which Irigaray's theory of Sexual Difference can be read or adapted to women from different groups.

black women, lesbians and mainstream white or heterosexual feminists.[93] However, these differences are the main reasons why feminist theory and politics has evolved, particularly during the last ten years. The debate triggered off by black feminists and lesbian feminists have considerably extended the scope of feminist studies and politics, which have benefitted from their challenging outlook. Despite the divisions which still exist in the 90s, I would argue that the idea of a female genealogy is still valid, at least as a guideline or an indispensable point of reference for all women who could adapt it, when necessary to their specific aims, although Irigaray may not agree with this approach. One of the strong points of *affidamento* is that differences between women were taken into consideration from the start, even if it was not without its problems.

The interviewer, Franca Chiaromonte, also mentioned the fact that, in the context of *affidamento*, some women may fear losing the self-confidence given by the group. One possible answer, following Irigaray's perspective, would be that if women can be given a strong sense of identity confirmed by their sense of belonging to a female genealogy, they may be able to overcome this fear and therefore attempt to posit themselves as autonomous

[93] The fact that Irigaray does not specifically refer to differences between women in her work, is also discussed in chapters Three and Four.

subjects in their own right. In my view, the principles of female genealogy and *affidamento* are complementary. I would also suggest that, in that case, the purpose of practices relevant to female genealogy is to develop this sense of identity at an individual and collective level.

A female genealogy is needed to enable women to have a space from which they can reconstruct the history of women's lives, symbolically and socially. These two elements cannot be separated in the Irigarian project since they are totally interactive. The right to assert sexual difference, that is to posit the female subject as a legitimate self and social agent, as well as the right to develop cultural practices aiming to give women the 'well-being', '*l'aise*', are rights women should be entitled to in society, as much as men. Finally the development of a relationship of mutual trust between women, modelled on the mother-daughter relationship, based on the recognition of qualities, experience and knowledge to be shared between women, should help women to respect each other and to situate the symbolic value of female genealogy in a political context.

I suggest that Irigaray's project can only be read as a political intention, the final aim of which is to make women aware of and to trust their female self as a potential maker of history: "J'appartiens à une communauté

historique, notamment de femmes".[94]

However, I would also point out that the realization of female genealogy, which for Irigaray, is "l'accomplissement de la puissance du sexe féminin", can only be understood as a phase of preparation before they become involved in a greater task:[95]

> L'apport culturel le plus difficile à faire entendre dans l'Histoire est la contribution différente des femmes et des hommes au développement de la civilisation.[96]

The first step in the fulfilment of this task is for men and women to learn to communicate through what Irigaray calls the 'negative', *'le négatif'*.

2.4. The 'negative', *'le travail du négatif'*.

It can be said that *'le travail du négatif'* can be considered to be essential to the reconstruction of the position of enunciation, for the female speaking subject as well as for the male speaking subject.

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[94] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité de l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),p.226.

[95] 'l'accomplissement de la puissance du sexe féminin' is used by Luce Irigaray, in *Parler n'est Jamais Neutre* (Paris:Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.294-295.

[96] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.67.

2.4.1. Definition of the 'negative', *'le négatif'*.

For the philosopher, the expression *'le négatif'* implies the acceptance of one's limits, that is to say, of the limits of men, as a group, and of women as another group: "le négatif comme limite d'un genre par rapport à l'autre", "Je ne suis pas tout"[97]. In fact, this statement should be read as saying different things for men and women.

For women, 'Je ne suis pas tout' means that I exist as a woman, and maybe more importantly, as a female subject, with my own history which is part of a female genealogy that is still in the process of being constructed. The female group, 'genre', does not represent and control everything, but it exists in its own right, and has a role to play in the world.

For men, 'Je ne suis pas tout' means that I exist as a man who does not represent everything, 'Je ne suis pas le tout'.[98] The male subject is not the only legitimate point of reference capable of controlling the element of nature which is part of his make up. Nor does he have the exclusive right over human consciousness and rationality. Through the 'negative', men have to recognize their limits,

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[97] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),pp,29-30.

[98] Expression used several times in *J'Aime à Toi*.

as women do in a different way, and this act of acknowledgment should give men the opportunity to be reconciled with their body and affect.

As far as women are concerned, the 'negative' should enable them to realize that their body and affect should not be used as a pretext to automatically confine them to the 'nether world'. On the contrary, the negative should give them the chance to rehabilitate the part of nature which is also part of their self, as it would be for men.

Irigaray does emphasize that men and women should both consider themselves as being parts of nature as well as subjects capable of consciousness. They are both two equal but different components of human kind, 'le genre humain'.

> Le naturel est au moins deux: masculin et féminin...La nature n'est pas *une*...Il n'y a pas *la* nature. En ce sens, une forme de négatif existe dans le nature. Le négatif n'est pas une opération de la conscience dont seul l'homme serait capable. Plus même, si l'homme ne prend pas conscience de la limite inscrite dans la nature, son opposition au naturel n'accomplit pas le travail du négatif. Elle s'approprie le naturel et prétend le surmonter dans une conscience dès lors déterminée par cette naïveté naturelle: je suis le tout. Or nul(le) n'accomplit en soi le tout, ni de la nature ni de la conscience. Confondre la partie et le tout, c'est entacher le négatif d'une positivité imaginaire.[99]

To accept one's limits means that binary systems are no longer relevant when they are used to delimit the role

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[99] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),pp.65-66.

of men and women.

2.4.2. Role of 'the negative': *'le travail du négatif'*.

I would suggest that what Irigaray sets out to do is to use the 'negative' as a means of giving women and men the possibility of rethinking sexual difference before they engage in what she calls 'intersubjectivity'. Intersubjective relationships work as a mode of communication between subjects who have chosen to identify and address each other as legitimate speaking subjects. In the same way the philosopher claims that women should learn to love and posit themselves as subjects before being able to love and communicate with other women, women and men have to learn to accept that female subjectivity exists in its own right instead of attempting to subsume it, before they can love and respect women. In other words, the negative acts as a means of mediation between women and men. Its function is to enable women, and above all men, to distance themselves from the way they have been conditioned to perceive, understand, and react to the other sex, in order to express respect for each other by their readiness to communicate on a subject-to-subject mode.

> Ainsi le respect de la différence entre la femme et l'homme est déjà culture... Dans la différence sexuelle, le négatif en tant que limite est présent du seul fait du respect de la réalité naturelle comme

constitutive du sujet.[100]

> Le double travail du négatif... [est de transformer] l'impulsion immédiate ou le désir d'absolu en une présence attentive et retenue, concentrée et disponible, ouverte et réfléchie, réciproque dans la fidélité à soi. Une détermination nouvelle de l'intentionalité y a lieu.[101]

Through the 'negative', men, for example, would have the opportunity of including nature as part of their self. They would have to accept and respect the association between matter and spirit: "Le naturel ne doit plus s'abolir dans le spirituel, mais le spirituel concret consiste en la culture du naturel".[102] This process would imply that the role of morphology, in Irigarian terms, would have to be taken into account when attempting to understand the way identity is constructed.[103]

On the other hand, the 'negative' is also a way of enabling women and men to overcome sexual instincts, *'pulsions immédiates'*. In a feminist perspective, these instincts can be said to have indirectly contributed to the division of sex and gender instigated by patriarchal economy in order to justify male desire and men's ambition

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[100] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire*,(Paris:Grasset,1992),p.89.

[101] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire*,(Paris:Grasset,1992),p.228.

[102] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),p.90.

[103] The definition and role of the term 'morphology' are discussed in chapter One.

for domination and control. For Irigaray, the 'negative' can give women and men the opportunity of going beyond this hierarchical system as neither of them is superior to the other or in a position to impose his or her needs.

> Reste que nous sommes des hommes et des femmes. Et que cela constitue un universel vivant. Cet universel est lié à notre personne réelle, à ses besoins, ses aptitudes, ses désirs... le respect de la différence...est dépassement de l'immédiateté naturelle. Si l'homme et la femme se respectent comme deux moitiés de l'univers qu'ils représentent, ils surmontent en cette reconnaissance de l'autre leurs instincts et pulsions immédiates.[104]

The 'negative' operates as much as an act of appreciation of the other as a limit to the power of one group, '*genre*', over another and over the world. Therefore, regardless of the extent to which one group or the other intends to be everything, '*le tout*', this form of absolutism can no longer be acceptable.

> Le négatif dans la différence sexuelle est acceptation des limites de mon genre et reconnaissance de l'irréductibilité de l'autre. Il est insurmontable mais il donne un accès positif, ni instinctif ni pulsionnel, à l'autre.[105]

The future of a group, '*genre*', is linked to its participation in a dialectical relationship with the other group. Both groups can meet and engage in a constructive intersubjective dialogue through the 'negative'. Each

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[104] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité de l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),p.90.

[105] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire*,(Paris:Grasset,1992),p.32.

group has to understand that it can only materialize and make its genealogy progress by participating in the making of history with the other group, without which this task becomes impossible.

The purpose of the 'negative' is to make women and men realize that human kind is not made of complements, males and females, with the former more dominant and the latter naturally destined to fulfil men's needs. Men and women are indeed two components which exist in parallel, in their specificity, as two models of subjectivity without any hierarchichal divisions. The role of the 'negative' is therefore to give women and men a space enabling them to realize that their power of self-realization, and the way of shaping the world depend on the legitimization of each '*genre*'. Only then can womankind become part of universality:

> Chaque homme et chaque femme est un individu particulier, mais universel par son genre, auquel doit correspondre un droit approprié, droit commun à tout homme et à toute femme.[106]

Following Irigaray's postulate, I propose to interpret the evolution of the female subject as follows: the first stage consists of her acquisition of a status as an active and self-confident subject who is able to implement cultural practices relevant to '*genre*'. This process takes

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[106] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire*,(Paris:Grasset,1992),p.90.

place through the maturation of a female genealogy. The second phase corresponds to the female speaking subject's participation in intersubjective communication with the male subject, the aim of which is to write a common history of universality. As already mentioned, mutual respect is the sine qua non condition for the realisation of such a cultural project.

> Le respect du négatif, le jeu de la dialectique entre nous permettraient de demeurer soi et de faire oeuvre avec l'autre... Nous pouvons construire une Histoire sur une intériorité sans pouvoir. Pour cette tache,il est nécessaire d'être deux, un homme et une femme. Deux indéfiniment qui tissent des relations entre nature et culture, univers et société.[107]

The role of the 'negative', '*le travail du négatif*', can therefore be considered to be another way of giving women the possibility of getting out of patriarchal domination to rethink the social symbolic, presented in my argument, as the symbolic order and its resulting socio-cultural practices. But this time, women would seek to achieve this aim with men's cooperation, provided the latter respect the meaning and the rules of that space of openness and dialogue.

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[107] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire*,(Paris:Grasset,1992),p.231.

Conclusion.

In this chapter I have analysed Irigaray's notion of the sensible transcendental as an alliance between matter and spirit which can be understood as modes of 'having' and 'being'. In my view, Irigaray's proposition regarding the sensible transcendental can be envisaged as a potential answer to the symbolic violence of the dominant discourse denying women the right to exist as subjects. In agreement with the philosopher's argument, it is possible to accept that the role of women is to legitimize the sensible transcendental in order to create a space in society where the female subject can posit herself as a female citizen in her own right.

Two main phases determine this proposal of reconstruction: firstly the establishment of a female genealogy aiming to give women a voice, symbolically and politically. Symbolically, because the female subject can situate herself and identify to her 'genre' within female genealogy. Politically, because the materialization of female genealogy gives women the possibility of bringing about cultural changes through sexuate linguistic practices and reconstructed relationships of entrustment between women. The purpose of these practices is to break the monopoly of the male power over language and to facilitate opportunities of self-realization for women in society.

The second phase is the establishment of communication between men and women through the 'negative'.

The very idea of female genealogy also means that values attached to nature and the body can be rehabilitated. This corresponds to what Irigaray calls 'la légitimation du corps pensé'.[108] This reinstatement should benefit men too, inasmuch as the reconciliation of matter and spirit would mean that the male subject could learn to accept his body as an inevitable element of his self. The construction of male genealogy should also include the meaning and history of the male body.[109]

> Les perceptions se situent à la jonction du vital et du spirituel. Nos sens ... sont aussi les médiateurs de la pensée. Sans eux, elle est impossible; elle devient pur automatisme sans souci de liberté ni d'intention... Nos sens sont à la jonction de l'individuel et du social, du privé et du public.[110]

Another important aspect of female genealogy is its historical aspect. Irigaray does specify that existing genealogies, understood as accounts of women's lives, must also be included and remembered as being part of global

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[108] Expression used by Irigaray throughout *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987).

[109] The change of attitudes regarding the male body in relation to sexual practices since the AIDS crisis has shown that men have had to start re-evaluating the representation and the function of their body. This point is referred to in chapter Four.

[110] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.160.

female genealogy.

> Il y a une généalogie de femmes dans notre famille: nous avons une mère, une grand-mère, une arrière-mère maternelle et des filles... Essayons de nous situer dans cette généalogie féminine pour conquérir et garder notre identité. N'oublions pas, non plus, que nous avons déjà une histoire, que certaines femmes, même si c'était difficile culturellement, ont marqué l'histoire et que trop souvent nous ne les connaissons pas.[111]

To this statement, I would also add the political history of feminism and the development of Feminist Thought. In this context, the notion of female genealogy should be read as an act of collective memory to be legitimized in its own right, rather than as a movement of opposition to the male economy.

Legitimizing female genealogy amounts to adopting three main lines of action: making its intrinsic value symbolically visible, authenticating its existence through the practice of a sexuate language coinciding with cultural modes of exchange between women, and finally, using female genealogy as a base, an impetus capable of energizing women's desire to assert the rights of the female citizen in society.

The only point which is not elaborated by Irigaray is the articulation of differences between women within her

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[111] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.31.

idea of a female genealogy.[112]

I have interpreted the second phase of implementation of the sensible transcendental as that of the 'negative'. By opening a space where the male and the female subjects can reflect on their difference as speaking subjects, Irigaray proposes to go from a stage of reconstruction of female identity to the making of a common history between men and women, 'l'Histoire'.

> L'apport culturel le plus difficile à faire entendre dans l'Histoire est la contribution différente des femmes et des hommes au développement de la civilisation.[113]
>
> [L]'universel présente la particularité d'être divisé en deux. Ainsi le respect de la différence entre la femme et l'homme est déjà culture. Il est dépassement de l'immédiaté naturelle.[114]

The 'negative', as a space of communication between men and women enables the male and the female subjects to meet through respect for each other, by acknowledging their own limits. Their acceptance of the need for an alliance between spirit and matter, 'le spirituel concret' is also

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[112] This particular problem is discussed in chapters Three and Four.

[113] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)p.67.

[114] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),p.89.

a way forward in the history of human culture.[115]

Validating new cultural practices in society means that female citizenship has a crucial role to play in the application of female genealogy. This particular issue will be addressed in the next two chapters.

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[115] This expression is used by Irigaray in *J'Aime à Toi: Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992), pp. 90-91.

CHAPTER 3

'THE CIVIL WOMAN' AND FEMALE CITIZENSHIP

The purpose of this chapter is to show that Irigaray's attempt to reconstruct the female subject must be understood as the preparatory phase for a more global and pragmatic venture. As shown in chapter Two, wanting to recreate a legitimate space in the symbolic from which the female subject can have the power to name is not enough unless that space also enables women to generate significant changes in society. Female genealogy cannot be operational if it does not have an impact on socio-cultural practices in general. In her most recent work, Irigaray draws the outline of a project aiming to give the female subject a legitimate status and specific rights in society. I would argue that the propositions made by the philosopher since *Le Temps de la Différence*, reflect her intention to put her idea of 'social-symbolic' into practice by giving female identity a political dimension. Her strategy can be seen as a way of counteracting the symbolic violence exerted on women by patriarchal discourse.

This chapter proposes to answer the question often raised by many feminists: how can Irigaray's theory of Sexual Difference be concretely applied? This important issue, in my opinion, can be reformulated in the following way: how relevant is the Irigarian model of 'the civil woman', '*la femme civile*', to women in general and to women in contemporary French society in particular?

Irigaray sees the dominant culture as a force of alienation which does not recognize the reality and the potential of women as subjects.

> Les femmes, pour acquérir une liberté minimale, doivent se soumettre aux impératifs d'une culture qui n'est pas la leur.[1]

Consequently she draws the outline of a project aiming to institute a culture where women's 'civil identity' could be meaningful and powerful because it would be legitimized by rights corresponding to their identity and needs.

The notion of rights specific to women is only valid if it is attached to that of status. The status Irigaray claims for 'the civil woman' aims to enable women to act as autonomous citizens in society. Moreover, following the Irigarian line of reasoning, status seems to also play the part of the guarantor of women's rights.

What is needed, is the implementation of sexuate rights which are rights representing Sexual Difference.[2] Their aim is to give women the possibility of creating a new social order where a culture materializing female genealogy would benefit both women and men if it became legitimate practice. This standpoint will be discussed by looking at

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[1] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.106.

[2] The definition of the expression 'sexuate rights' is given in chapter One, note 89, p.64.

Irigaray's various proposals regarding women's rights in society but with one difference: Irigaray does not wish women to benefit from the rights men already enjoy if this means that women have to become 'neutral beings'. Irigaray uses the expression 'neutral beings' to refer to women who can only have the opportunity of being equal to men if they can be and act as men do.[3] However, the philosopher recognizes that fighting for equality is sometimes necessary, but mainly during selective action:

> Par exemple, femmes et hommes seraient mis en nombre égal dans toutes les activités sociales pour les faire évoluer. Certes, cette solution est à un certain niveau tout à fait souhaitable.[4]

Indeed, for Irigaray, this form of equality is incomplete because it ignores the implicit differences between men and women in societal order.

Irigaray wants women to have rights which can materialize and legitimize female subjectivity as formulated in her theory of sexuate culture. She summarizes her aim as follows:

> Pour faire respecter aujourd'hui ces droits qui me semblent correspondre à la subjectivité féminine, il faut en repasser par la loi écrite. Sinon celle-ci continue à s'exercer au détriment des filles, qui y sont aliénées dès leur naissance et par leurs

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[3] The meanings of neutrality and women are also discussed in different frameworks in the first two chapters.

[4] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.105.

> généalogies. De plus, il me paraît souhaitable que les femmes créent un ordre social dans lequel pourra se déployer leur subjectivité avec ses symboles, ses images, ses réalités et rêves, donc avec des moyens objectifs d'échanges subjectifs.[5]

The interdependence of 'objective means', exchanges between subjects, be they male or female, and social order, stresses the importance Irigaray attaches to the need to materialize female subjectivity in society. Sexuate culture can be understood not as an abstract goal to strive for but as the objectification of women's life in society. By objectification of women's life, I obviously do not allude to women as society's objects; I use this expression in the Bourdieusian sense, to express the idea of external materialization and institutionalization of the representations and practices specific to women's life in society.

An example of external materialization could be the representation of motherhood presented as an option totally independent from female identity. It could also be empowering images of women as mentors for other women, in a spiritual or political sense.[6]

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[5] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1991),pp.12-13.

[6] For more details on the role of women as mentors, refer to the section of chapter Two which discusses Irigaray's proposals related to *'l'entre-femmes'*.

Another example of institutionalization of practices relevant to sexuate culture could be the allocation of the same roles and functions for women as those still reserved for men in political or religious domains. However, women in these positions would use strategies and practices reflecting female genealogy instead of having to conform to the line of conduct imposed by the dominant economy. In theory, equal opportunity policies are supposed to give women the chance to have access to the same positions as those traditionally reserved for men. But Irigaray does specify that, to be on an equal footing with men does in no way mean that women should be expected to fit in with the role models shaped by current male patterns. Innovative methods initiated by women would have to be accepted and adopted as valid criteria as is sometimes the case in the United States in the domain of managerial practices implemented by women, where their approach to staff management and commercial contacts have proved so successful that they are now taught in management courses. In other words, Irigaray's idea of a sexuate culture can be seen as a concrete way of changing the existing system of symbols linked to practices dominated by the male economy. It can be read as a theory of practice created to generate social and cultural changes, "une mutation culturelle et sociale".[7]

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[7] Expression mentioned in Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.73.

When Irigaray argues for a sexuate culture based on sexuate rights, she attempts to show how the 'social symbolic' can work, symbolically and politically as a force instigating socio-cultural changes in society. In my view, the social symbolic can be defined firstly, as a strategy aspiring to give women real social visibility by legitimizing the status and rights defining female citizenship. Secondly, the aim of the 'social symbolic' is to enable women and men to develop relations of mutual respect and equality in difference which the philosopher calls '*rapports de civilité*'. This process is only possible if Sexual Difference is legitimized by sexuate rights. The 'social symbolic' is the reverse of '*le social désubjectivé*' which denies women the right to be and act as legitimate and responsible citizens in their own right.[8]

The relationship between rights and culture in Irigaray's proposals will be analysed as follows:

Firstly by looking at Irigaray's concept of virginity. Virginity will be analysed in terms of physical and moral integrity.

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[8] Irigaray's idea of '*social désubjectivé*' can be said to be a consequence of symbolic violence, in the Bourdieusian sense. This expression is mentioned by Luce Irigaray, in *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions du Seuil,1987),p.31.

Secondly, by evaluating the rights of women over their own body. Three issues will be addressed: the reappropriation of the female body by the 'the civil woman', reproduction and the independence of 'the civil woman', and sexuate rights and New Techniques of Reproduction, (NTR).

Thirdly, I will suggest that the role of 'the civil woman' in society can be assessed by looking at the relationship between 'civility' and citizenship. Three separate points will be examined to interpret Irigaray's notion of 'civility': the universal individual and 'the civil woman', 'civility' and status, 'civility', contract and visibility and finally 'civility' and the Sexual Contract. A parallel will be established between the Sexual Contract and the French republican motto: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity.

References will be made to various items of French legislation to contextualize the discussion. However, I would like to stress the fact that no link is made between the articles of law used as references in my argument and their French legal framework which will not be critically assessed as such since this is not the aim of this debate.

1. SEXUATE RIGHTS AND VIRGINITY.

To empower 'the civil woman' which I will define, at this stage of the discussion, as the female citizen in her own right, Irigaray proposes to review some of the rights affecting women the most, such as those concerning women's autonomy. She proposes establishing a different link between nature and social order.

According to the philosopher, one way of giving the female body a reality and an autonomy of existence is to institute and legalize rights related to virginity.

1.1. Virginity and physical integrity.

> La virginité doit être redécouverte par toutes les femmes comme leur bien corporel et spirituel, ce qui peut leur redonner un statut d'identité individuelle et collective...qui échappe ainsi au commerce entre hommes... La virginité, pas plus que l'identité féminine, ne se reçoit de naissance. Nous naissons vierges, sans doute. Nous avons aussi à le devenir, à délivrer nos corps et nos esprits d'entraves familiales, culturelles, etc.[9]

Virginity has several meanings in the Irigarian discourse. Firstly, it is associated with physical integrity. Irigaray wants virginity to be inscribed as a right guaranteeing women the autonomy and control of

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[9] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.141-142.

their own body. This proposition is interesting because it situates the female body within the law which should confirm the status of independence and ensure the legal standing of the female body. Like any other property protected by law, the individual possessing this property should be the only one to decide how to use it, within the confines of the law. The direct consequence of this law would result in an act of reappropriation of her body by the female citizen. Women's virgin bodies could no longer be regarded as either men's property, that is to say, as an object of exchange between fathers and husbands or between men for sexual purposes. In France, for example, rape was only recognized as a crime in 1980.[10] On the face of it, it seems that the female body had no legal value as such, although virginity was indeed considered to be a cultural given. Before 1980, rape was considered to be an offence, '*un délit*, which meant that it was judged by a magistrates'court, the equivalent in France of '*tribunal correctionnel*', and was not considered to be serious enough to be severely punished. A crime is usually judged by a Crown Court, the equivalent of '*cour d'assises*' which deals with more serious cases. Rape has therefore always been morally condemned but not always considered to be serious enough to incur a long prison sentence. It could be said that it is precisely because

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[10] Law 80-1041 of the 23.12.1980 detailed in the Penal Code. *Code Pénal* (Paris:Jurisprudence Générale Dalloz,1989-1990),p.223,article 332.

acts of violence such as rape were sexual that they were dismissed as crimes in a society where cultural practices are very much influenced by the economy of the male gaze.[11]

Another consequence of a law legalizing virginity, in the Irigarian sense of the term, would be that virginity can no longer be used as a moral principle working as a 'marketable' product brandished by institutions such as the State, the family and the Church, in order to control the dominant social order. In the context of this argument, the term 'marketable', '*monnayable*', is used in its literal as well as figurative sense, in accordance with Irigaray's use of this expression.

> S'il est vrai que les filles sont moins échangées entre hommes dans nos cultures, il y reste de nombreux lieux de commerce de leur virginité et rien n'a remplacé le statut de l'identité des filles comme corps monnayables entre hommes. Les filles ont besoin d'une identité positive à laquelle se référer comme personne civile individuelle et sociale.[12]

What Irigaray means here, is that the female body is still used as a commodity designed to satisfy male desire although it is not exchanged as such any more, as in the case of arranged marriages. The pornographic industry,

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[11] The issue of rape is discussed in more detail in the section 3.3.2, entitled 'Civility and society as a mediator, '*un Tiers*'.

[12] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.77.

however, is one example of permanent exploitation of women's bodies. The philosopher claims that if the female body was legitimized as a component of women's identity to be legally protected in its own right, it would imply that virginity would become part of women's civil status. Hence the symbolic importance of recognizing physical acts of violence against women as crimes.

Positioning virginity as a legal concept also has further repercussions.

1.2. Virginity and moral integrity.

Virginity, in this context, has a second meaning. It has to be understood in the sense of moral integrity, related to the dominant cultural order and to incest. Irigaray stresses the ambivalence of the system of exchange of women in society. On one hand, incest is illegal, but, on the other hand, exchanges of women between men are legalized by the patriarchal order ratifying the idea of children belonging to parents, especially to fathers. This statement is authenticated by the important part played by the patronymic which marks paternal influence symbolizing the Name of the Father. Although it could be argued that parental authority is allocated, in most cases, to mothers in case of separation or divorce, nevertheless, culturally, paternal authority prevails, and men continue to consider

their children as their property. It is therefore not surprising that, in the collective unconscious, the importance of having a child, preferably a male descendant who would continue to bear the name of his father and transmit it to future generations is still deeply rooted in patriarchal tradition, regardless of social class.[13]

One argument against this point of view could be that, since the 1980s, many men, some of them fathers, have become unemployed and consequently cannot fulfil their role as main providers for their family as they used to. This may result in a loss of self-confidence perceived by themselves and their family as a loss of power which can be interpreted as a loss of symbolic authority. On the other hand, men who stay at home to look after their children because they are unemployed may change the way they perceive their role and responsibilities towards their family and society. They may feel more equal to their wives or partners and realize that they cannot automatically consider themselves as the only legal authority within the family. Conversely, they may feel forced to rethink their position because they have had to do so under the pressure of economic circumstances and not out of choice. They may even feel threatened by women who

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[13] Children were allowed to keep their mother's name, if requested, in 1985. *Code Civil* (Paris:Dalloz, 1992-1993),Article 43, p.69. Such a choice usually necessitates lengthy administrative procedures.

become breadwinners and therefore appear to have more power of decision and more impact on society. In that case, men still do not face up to the fact that changing their attitude is also their responsibility. Such tendencies explain the current backlash which has materialized by a return of traditional values supported by parties and movements of the extreme right. According to these parties, a woman's role is to stay at home to look after her husband and children.

Some legal reforms aiming to give women more control over their children and family have started to take place in France since the 1970s. One instance is the reform of parental authority which gives equal legal control to fathers and mothers. This means that the father is legally, if not in practice, no longer the head of the family.[14] Another example is that of the 1982 law on fiscal rights which states that the father can no longer be considered to act as the only head of the family. Since then, all declarations of income have had to be signed by husband and wife. Women are now recognized as responsible persons in the domain of fiscal right. This shows that legal changes, although they do not make much difference to underlying patriarchy, still give women the chance to acquire more independence and power in society. However,

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[14] *Code Civil* (Paris:Editions Dalloz,1992-1993), Articles 371-387,pp.297-318.

legislation can only be really effective if it is used as a stepping stone towards a more radical evolution of mores.

Debatably, perhaps, Irigaray suggests that, initially, women should have priority as regards child custody. This standpoint may appear controversial. One of the problems with this proposal is that it may discourage men from feeling fully responsible for their children. The sharing of parental duties seems to have improved, thanks to the feminists who raised awareness in this domain. Enabling mothers to have priority rights may prove to be a retrograde step. However, men have shown that they cope with this sort of situation which sometimes occurs when women are granted custody of their children. They have created agencies, the aim of which is to claim more rights over their children.

One positive aspect of a law giving mothers priority rights over their children is to give them the possibility of fighting or preventing abductions. This often occurs in case of separation of the partners of mixed marriages, or when partners live in different countries. Some fathers have abducted their children and women have had very little legal recourse.[15]

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[15] This problem has been pointed out to me by a feminist activist, Odette Brun, when she was in charge of counselling women who had been involved in such situations. Odette Brun is one of the main women in charge of the running of *La Maison des Femmes*, in Paris.

The debate on parental authority has somehow changed since 1989 after the International Convention on children's rights. France, like other countries, has had to change laws concerning parental authority in order to respect the rights of the child who is now considered to be a legal entity in its own right, '*une personne civile à part entière*'. France has also signed the European Convention Agreement confirming the new status and rights of self-representation for the child:

> [...] l'excercice des droits de l'Enfant ... doit notamment autoriser les mineurs à s'exprimer ou être informés d'une procédure familiale devant un tribunal. Le convention prévoit que le tribunal ou toute personne nommée pour agir au nom des mineurs a un certain nombre de devoirs pour faciliter l'exercice des droits des enfants et que ces derniers pourront exercer leurs droits, soit directement, soit par l'intermédiaire d'autres personnes ou organes.[16]

This statement would mean that the decision to allocate specific preferential rights to mothers, as argued by Irigaray, could, to some extent, be overridden. Although her argument would have to be analysed according to this new approach, the fact remains that cultural practices still priviledge the symbolic power of paternal order.[17]

Another important issue is that of child-abuse. As in the case of abduction, it could also be argued that men who

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[16] *Actualités Sociales Hebdomadaires*,1980,7.6.1996,p.6.

[17] The question of children's rights had to be mentioned to contextualize Irigaray's proposals in this domain. However, more discussion on this subject is needed but it is not the role of this thesis to do so.

carry out sexual or child abuse treat their victims as their property over which they are, unconsciously or not, exercising their own right. Most of the time, the children are sent back to their parents until the father or the paternal figure, whether the grandfather, the brother or another male member of the family, is proven guilty; the abuse usually continues. The situation is all the more intricate as rather frequently, the mother tends to disregard the abuse, either because she is a victim as well, or because she is too terrified of her husband. Moreover, the stigma projected by society as regards incest or sexual abuse makes women feel powerless and generates unjustified guilt.

> L'Etat cautionne cette barbarie des chefs de famille. La mère se tait car elle n'ose rien dire. Elle ne sait pas quoi dire d'ailleurs. Elle, non plus, la mère n'a aucun droit vis-à-vis de ses enfants contre le chef de famille.[18]

Although nowadays, in France, both men and women are given equal parental rights by law, it does not mean that it makes it easy for women to take their husband/partner to court for sexual abuse over their children. Women need support in order to present their case. This involves the cooperation of either a representative of a medical profession, a member of Social Services or a police

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[18] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche),p.88. When Irigaray suggests that women have no recourse against men as heads of the family, it is because she refers to the symbolic authority most fathers still think they should embody, as shown in the rest of this debate.

officer specialized in such cases. Facing institutions can be very daunting. This is why it is becoming more and more common for women's magazines, for instance, to inform women about their rights in order to make them aware that their problem is not unusual and to let them know that they are entitled to demand support.[19]

It is very difficult for women to face up to the fact that their husband or male partner is committing sexual abuse. Firstly vis à vis themselves as wives and sexual partners, and secondly vis à vis the ideal nurturing role society automatically associates with the idea of motherhood.

Irigaray's point of view on incest is similar to that of many other studies on sexual abuse and incest. When, for instance, the mother is accused too, because she is told she must have been aware of the abuse and therefore she should have done something to stop it, none of the reasons explaining her silence are judged to be acceptable.

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[19] In 1994, the French edition of Marie-Claire presented a section specialized on new legislation related to women's rights. As part of this section an article entitled 'Les droits que vous ignorez' informed women of their rights regarding sexual abuse of children. The article stated that anybody who has committed sexual abuse on a child under the age of 15 can be jailed for up to 20 years. However, it was also pointed out that this sort of sentence is rarely applied. Marie-France Vigor, 'Les Droits que vous ignorez', *Marie-Claire,* 502 (1994),113-118 (p.113).

Mostly, the mother is also a victim, but to accuse her seems to diminish the father's responsibility. Different tactics are used to put women in a difficult situation resulting in diverting the necessity of questioning the place of fathers in society. This does not mean that all women are helpless victims; what this de facto situation indicates is that patriarchal rules are so deeply anchored in socio-cultural practices that women themselves often end up capitulating to the models of identity and patterns of behaviour which appear to become insurmountable.

> C'est comme s'il y avait une exploitation de la victime pour ne pas trop pénaliser le père. Car l'enjeu est ici de taille. Pour la société et le patriarcat la vérité est plus dangereuse que le déni judiciaire.[20]

Marie-France Casalis adds that women mostly end up being the defendant. If a mother remains silent about the abuse, she becomes the accomplice. If she denounces the abuser, she is accused of trying to destroy a man over whom she wants to take revenge for personal reasons. Either way, women rarely seem to win.

> Dans une récente rencontre nationale du Collectif Féministe contre le Viol ont été analysés l'ensemble des procès suivis par les diverses équipes à travers la France. La synthèse en est terrifiante. Quand

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[20] *L'Inceste*, Marie-France Casalis, in *Actes, Hommes et Libertés, Revue de la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*.

During an informal interview with a British police officer specializing in child abuse, I was told that although conclusive evidence against a male abuser is considered to be irrefutable, the police officer knows on walking into the courtroom if the abuser will be recognized as guilty or not depending on the judge in charge.

> les mères se battent et accusent les pères elles sont accusées de nourrir des griefs à l'encontre de leur compagnon... Si c'est une grand'mère qui dénonce les faits... il s'agit d'une mère abusive qui cherche à détruire le foyer de sa fille dont elle ne supporte pas qu'elle vive sa vie.[21]

According to Irigaray, although the penal code holds that physical incest should be punished, incest is not considered to be a breach of moral integrity and therefore is not punishable as such. The unformulated belief that paternal control over their wife and children, particularly their daughters, is men's prerogative still persists. According to the philosopher as long as this form of symbolic incest is implicitly guaranteed by the dominant social order, women will not be in a position to demand a status of legal entities, '*des personnes civiles à part entière*'. The only way of fighting this alienation is to institute rights specific to women:

> Face à ces deux incivilités des hommes :
> . posséder les vierges pour fonder l'ordre symbolique de leur culture
> . pratiquer en plus l'inceste réel au sein de la famille,
> un recours juridique est nécessaire... D'où la nécessité de redéfinir le contenu de l'objectivité du droit des personnes civiles en tant qu'hommes et que

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[21] Marie-France Casalis, 'L'Inceste' in *Actes, Hommes et Libertés, Revue de la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*.

femmes.[22]

This point of view seems all the more relevant nowadays as the return of several forms of fundamentalism is becoming more and more threatening for women, be they the victims of Catholic fundamentalism or Muslim fundamentalism. How can we justify the fact that female virginity is still valued or even compulsory in some cases although the words male and virginity seem to be a contradiction in terms?

Jean-Paul Branlard points out the paradox underlining women's and men's rights as regards sexuality and law.

> La nature masculine et la nature féminine n'ayant pas de point commun, chacun des deux sexes est régi par une morale distincte... Et pour leur apprendre à bien se conduire, les filles sont "chambrées" comme il se doit, surveillées jusqu'à leur mariage par les pères et les frères. Programmées, elles passent sans transition de la virginité à la maternité légitime. Tel est le culte de la chasteté féminine que l'on célèbre encore par le choix du prénom: "Vierge-Marie".[23]

This analysis corroborates Irigaray's theory of symbolic incest and also shows how efficiently the dominant social order permeates the collective unconscious in this domain. Even if physical virginity is now irrelevant before

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[22] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),pp.88-89. The expression *'l'inceste réel'* refers to physical incest opposed to what can be called *'l'inceste symbolique'* corresponding to the violation of a woman's moral right to virginity which is not respected by patriarchal culture as already demonstrated.

[23] Jean-Paul Branlard, *Le Sexe et l'Etat des Personnes: Aspects historiques, sociologiques et juridiques* (Paris:L.G.D.J.1993), Paragraph 1069,p.372.

marriage in many European countries, the sense of moral integrity attached to female virginity as a right for women to own and have control over their own body is still denied to them. Although young girls can get married at 15, young men have to wait to be 18 to enter marriage.[24] It would appear that girls of 15 are judged mature enough to reproduce and therefore to be emancipated through marriage whereas boys of that age have to wait another three years to reach the same stage since their identity is not constructed through virginity or reproduction. This raises the problem of the age of consent which is 15 for boys and girls in France. Interestingly enough, the article concerning the age of consent appears in the category 'Indecent assault', '*Attentat aux moeurs*' in the French Penal Code.

> Tout attentat à la pudeur sur la personne d'un mineur âgé de plus de quinze ans et non émancipé par le mariage commis ou tenté, sans violence ni contrainte ni surprise... par une personne ayant autorité sur elle, sera puni d'un emprisonnement de 5 à 10 ans.[25]

It is worth noting that a young person is considered to be emancipated by marriage and not by his or her ability to engage in sexual relations which take place outside the family, be they heterosexual or homosexual. There is a clear divide between sex seen as a means of reproduction which is seen as useful and positive and on the other hand,

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[24] *Code Civil* (Paris:Dalloz,1992-1993),Article 144,p.126.

[25] *Code Pénal* (Paris:Jurisprudence Générale Dalloz,1989-1990),article 331-1,p.223.

sex linked to pleasure which is tolerated but does not give any status. In the case of 'indecent assault' carried out by homosexuals, the nature of the sexual offence is considered worse. This can be explained by the fact that homosexuality is a threat to the very notion of family and reproduction and therefore to the dominant social order.[26]

Irigaray's insistence on seeing legislation introduced to legitimize rights specific to 'the civil woman' may seem paradoxical if one admits that legislation is not enough in itself to bring about radical change. However, I would argue that concepts such as rights defining virginity, in Irigarian terms, if made legal, could gradually change the understanding of what this notion implies in terms of moral duty and ensuing patterns of behaviour. Political correctness, for example, has not modified mores drastically even if it has generated new linguistic practices. But this movement still means that men become more aware of issues such as sexual harassment even if quite a few of them may not regard it as a punishable offence. Legislation against such means of discrimination is useful inasmuch as it progressively initiates trends of cultural evolution. More importantly it gives women the opportunity of having legal recourse against various forms of oppression and therefore it enables them to make their

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[26] This point will be analysed in more detail in chapter Four.

voice heard. What does not exist in the eyes of the law has no power of visibility. It remains legally unidentified. From an Irigarian perspective, if associations implementing cultural practices advocated by female genealogy had a legal status, they could support women as citizens in their own right. This is not always the case with unions or equal opportunity groups which do not necessarily enter the debate of identity politics. The support of associations functioning according to the principles of female genealogy would mean that women would not have to fight alone in order to obtain what they want or even in order to survive. Such support groups would also enable women to be more self-confident when they have to face difficult situations such as European court cases.

Irigaray's wish to ask for virginity to be a legal right, the right of the individual, '*le droit de la personne*', has to be understood as a way of politicizing the female body in order to enable women to reappropriate a part of their identity.

2. 'THE CIVIL WOMAN' AND BODY POLITICS

Another important domain of reform appearing in Irigaray's propositons is that of reproduction and motherhood. The main questions attached to these key areas are the following: whose body is the female body, and how should motherhood function in society?

2.1. Reappropriation of the female body by 'the civil woman'.

In *Le Marché des Femmes*, Irigaray makes the following statement:

> La société que nous connaissons, la culture qui est la nôtre, est fondée sur l'échange des femmes... Ce qui assure donc le passage à l'ordre social, à l'ordre symbolique, à l'ordre tout court, c'est que les hommes, ou les groupes d'hommes, font circuler entre eux les femmes... Quelle que soit la forme familialiste que cette prohibition peut prendre dans un certain état de la société, sa signification est d'une toute autre portée. Elle assure le fondement de l'ordre économique, social, culturel, qui est le nôtre depuis des siècles.[27]

Irigaray's basic postulate, as already shown, is that women's bodies constitute a kind of infrastructure, that is to say, a matter defined by its sex used as merchandise, therefore, as an object of exchange between men. This merchandise does not seem to have any specific

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[27] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions du Seuil,1977)p.167.

importance and yet, it is the most exploited product in society. It works as if the body and soul of women were disassociated, as if women were stripped of their inner being in order to use their body as an empty signifier, the purpose of which is to be filled with a meaning shaped by and for the male economy. Irigaray calls this male economy, hom(m)osexuality, in other words, a man's world made by and for men who control social order. If men use women as products of exchange, they do not really exchange ideas or values with them. According to the philosopher, this system can be interpreted as a socio-cultural endogamy where women are not exchanged as women. If they were, it would infer that they have a value of their own. They are in fact exchanged as 'by-products' of the Phallus according to which they remain a plus or a minus.

> Ce n'est donc pas en tant que "femmes" que les femmes sont échangées, mais en tant qu'elles sont ramenées à quelque chose qui leur serait commun - leur cote en or, ou phallus... Pas un plus ou un moins de qualités féminines, évidemment. Celles-ci éventuellement [sont] abandonnées aux besoins du consommateur[...].[28]

The female body is thus divided in two parts, adds Irigaray: one, being the 'natural body' and the other, corresponding to the exchangeable merchandise which can only exist and be valued through the male gaze. This interpretation is important because it means that the two

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[28]Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions du Seuil)p.171.

parts of the female body cannot be reassociated; therefore, a unified identity becomes inconceivable. The value of a merchandise can only be fixed in relation to another merchandise. But if this value can only be established by the consumer according to his desire or needs, two products, in this context, two female bodies cannot be used as mutual referents to compare values and prices. Their only referent is what the male 'consumer-exchange' has made of a particular merchandise.[29]

Irigaray argues in favour of a reappropriation of their bodies by women in order to establish their rights.

> Il est important que nous gardions nos corps tout en les sortant du silence et de l'asservissement. Nous sommes historiquement les gardiennes de la chair, nous n'avons pas à abandonner cette garde mais à l'identifier comme nôtre, en invitant les hommes à ne pas faire de nous "leurs corps", une caution à leurs corps.[30]

The point of this reappropriation is not to take women's bodies out of men's reach but to enable women to regain control over the female body which should be considered as an independent entity, belonging first and foremost to women. They should be able to reclaim it as their own and to posit it as part of their self without being confined to the symbolic and cultural functions

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[29] The terms with inverted commas are all taken from the chapter: Luce Irigaray, 'Le Marché des Femmes', in *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),pp.167-185.

[30] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987)p.31.

patriarchal economy has attributed to the female body. The issue seems to be even more complicated than those raised by virginity. Irigaray stresses the importance of detaching the female body from the links it is supposed to have automatically with, firstly, the male body, and secondly, with the child's. She objects to the belief that these links are considered, in both cases, as unavoidable and natural.

Irigaray advocates that women's bodies have a 'rhythm' of their own. Women go through various physical cycles during their life which are different from those characterizing men's life.

> [...] les femmes n'ont pas le même rapport à l'entropie, à l'homéostasie, à la décharge. Elles ont une régulation interne beaucoup plus forte qui les maintient dans un processus de croissance constant et irréversible... Cela n'est pas forcément négatif[...].[31]

In *Le Temps de la Différence*, Irigaray talks about the economy of the female body by referring to the mechanical processes Freud used to explain the functioning of the male body. The philosopher chooses to adopt mimicry to denounce the inadequacy of the dominant discourse as regards female sexuality. By producing a discourse parallel to that of Freud, she shows that if one follows his models, one can only reach conclusions which always work to the detriment

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[31] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence: Pour une Révolution Culturelle* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.42.

of women since their sexuality is, there again, explained as the counterpart of male sexuality and not according to their own specificity as women.

Following Freud's account of sexuality, Irigaray defines these processes as a thermodynamic system consisting of a recurrent process of tension, discharge and homeostasis. These three stages are thought to be insurmountable. They represent the basic principles and models of sexuality for Freud who specifies that there are only two ways of getting out of this mechanistic 'destiny': either by procreating or by sublimating what he calls 'partial drives', which, in this context, are our five senses. To regain some sense of balance, one has to return to the stage of homeostasis. This return to stability is difficult to achieve because we are constantly driven by the desire to exploit our sexual potential always as quickly and intensely as possible. Irigaray sums up the situation as follows:

> Devenir hommes ou femmes signifierait simplement devenir reproducteurs et non pas capables d'une énergie à penser, partager, cultiver avec l'autre sexe.[32]

She compares human sexuality with contemporary technology and its competitive trends which influence our lives directly or indirectly. Thus she exposes the frenetic and obsessive character of our permanent search for pleasure

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[32] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989)p.38.

which becomes a form of pathos 'of an ever increasing energy, of an individual and collective economic growth without any regulation or harmony'. She concludes that we end up denying our body its natural rhythm.

By advocating a return to a 'natural rhythm', she speaks, firstly, in favour of the respect of the various cycles the female body has to go through and, secondly, against the discrimination women have to suffer in society because of the social inadequacy to which their body is supposed to reduce them. She firmly states that the various stages of the female body cannot be interpreted as limitations but, on the contrary, as part of a physical and spiritual evolution.

> Ce qui est souvent défini comme la fin d'une vie de femme correspond aussi bien à l'accès pour elle au temps disponible pour la vie sociale, la vie culturelle, la vie politique... Elles sont - du fait de leur corps féminin - en perpetuelle croissance, y compris à la dernière partie de leur vie.[33]

This assertion does not imply that women are not capable of being active socially or politically at earlier phases of their life. Irigaray sees the evolution of the female body as a potential and not as a hindrance to responsibilities in the polis. She is therefore asking for rights adapted to men and women so that they can both live in a society the structures of which are more flexible and in harmony with their needs. Discrimination would not be

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[33] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)p.140.

so strong if men and women did not have to conform to a set of norms and practices imposed by the dominant economy. They could both benefit, at different periods of their lives, from conditions adapted to their specific needs.[34]

What Irigaray is asking for is respect of integrity and difference to be provided by sexuate rights.

> [...] il n'y a quasiment pas encore de type de travail qui permette à une femme de gagner sa vie comme tout citoyen sans aliéner son identité dans des enjeux et des conditions de travail qui sont adaptés aux seuls hommes.[35]

She wants to break the division imposed by what she calls a 'sexist ideology' which reduces women to their role of reproduction whilst men are supposed to devote themselves to production.

> [...] il n'y a pas de motif de sous payer le travail d'un corps par rapport à celui d'un autre. Toutes les luttes antiracistes devraient nous avoir appris de telles vérités [...].[36]

According to the philosopher, whatever a body produces, be it a child or work for society, both functions are to

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[34] A practical example of this flexibility, nowadays, is the system of jobshare which alleviates the pressure put on men and women to perform at all cost; it is a way of creating more equality between male and female workers and of adopting easier working conditions for both.

[35] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.106.

[36] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.144.

be valued equally. The philosopher does not suggest that some kind of table of financial equivalence should be used to compare reproduction or work produced by women for the family with work produced outside these situations. She proposes that reproduction and work provided by women within their family should not be devalued because it has always been been presented as naturally female. The philosopher does not directly address the issue of wages for housewives or mothers. Her purpose in this particular part of the debate is to stress the need for better conditions of work respecting women's right to be themselves without having to constantly fit into the patterns of behaviour men expect of them.

> En effet, pour obtenir une chance de vivre libres, les femmes sont contraintes de se soumettre aux moyens de production des hommes et d'accroître leur capital ou patrimoine socio-culturel. Elles entrent malgré tout dans les circuits du travail mais elles y aliènent leur identité féminine.[37]

When Irigaray talks about '*identité féminine*' she does not mean that there is a biologically determined identity for all women. What she wants to point out is that women should not let their identity be alienated by the dominant culture which denies them the possibility of implementing practices relevant to female genealogy.

Irigaray claims that women must reappropriate their body in order to reassert its value firstly as their own

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[37] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.106.

property, secondly as a body specific to women and not as a faulty replica of the male body and thirdly as a way of restoring the balance in the debate on equality by emphasizing the need for a more 'natural rhythm' which is vital for both men and women. This act of reappropriation, according to the philosopher, can only be done within a legal framework.

2.2. Reproduction and the independence of 'the civil woman'.

Following the same reasoning, Irigaray also argues in favour of the independance of the female body as regards children.

According to the philosopher, the female body does not belong to children anymore than it does to men. This is an important statement which counterbalances the idea that the female body cannot reach a level of maturity without going through child-bearing. This point of view has been denounced by many feminists who claim this assumption is a fallacy fostered by patriarchal ideology. They also argue that this ideology is implemented by the dominant order, be it imposed by parties of the right or the left, in order to reinforce the ideal traditional image of the family they present as vital for the well-being of society.

Irigaray's desire to rethink the female body through a series of rights can be read as an attempt to redefine its meaning, its function and its place in society. I would also argue that it is a way of situating female identity outside the cultural and economic boundaries which have manipulated its role by restricting it to reproduction and satisfaction of male desire. For Irigaray, it is essential to give back the female body its autonomy.

> [...] l'enjeu de la libération des femmes n'est pas de devenir les "super-nanas" ou "super-women" d'une culture qui les exploite de nos jours de cette manière, mais de découvrir une identité irréductible à la maternité, au "faire comme les hommes" ou comme de bonnes petites machines performantes.[38]

During an interview with Hélène Rouch, a specialist in biology, Irigaray questions her about the function of the placenta. Irigaray points out the ambiguity of the argument using the crucial function of the fusion between mother and child to justify the essentialist discourse aiming to confine women to their role as mothers. Rouch argues that the way the imaginary fusion between mother and child is analysed in traditional psychoanalytic terms should be seen as a version of the cultural imaginary constructed by the dominant order rather than as the only possible interpretation of the mother/child initial bonding. She stresses that the conditions of the child's entry into the symbolic and language do not have to be

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[38] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.118.

guaranteed by the father, or the Law-of-the-Father, whose presence and role are presented as the only way of avoiding chaos resulting from the break of the initial mother/child fusion. Rather, she explains that the separation between the 'self' of the mother and the 'other' embodied by the child has already taken place during pregnancy. According to Hélène Rouch, the function of the placenta cannot be reduced to mechanisms of fusion where mother and child are thought to form one single being because of the mixing of their blood and bodies. Nor can the function of the placenta be seen as aggressive because the foetus appears to be an intruder in the mother's body. The placenta has a relatively autonomous role which consists, on one hand, in regulating the hormonal balance of the mother's body and, on the other hand, in enabling the growth of the child. The idea that a fusion takes place between the maternal tissues and the embryoid tissues does not correspond to biological reality. This interpretation is determined by cultural constructs aiming to justify the role of the father as the only guarantor of access to autonomy and order. In fact, autonomy and mutual respect between mother and child already exist during the gestation period.[39]

The validity of this argument may be disputed by

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[39] Luce Irigaray, 'La culture de la différence', in *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990)pp.55-63.

certain feminists because of its biological origin. However, in my view, it is important because it contradicts the very essentialist discourse which has always used so -called biological facts to explain the inevitability of women's subjection. Moreover, Rouch's interpretation offers the possibility of reassessing the mother/child relationship in terms of autonomy, mutual respect and pre-existing order within feminist thought.

What matters the most, in this debate, is to rethink the place and function of the female body as they have been fixed by the symbolic order and consequently reflected in social order. To do so, and following Irigaray's reasoning, I would argue that one of the main areas needing reviewing is the family.

For Irigaray, the family is a locus of duty imposed by collective practices materializing patriarchal norms, be they perceived consciously or not. I would add that the whole economic system works in favour of the family unit.[40] This can be seen with the tax system designed to favour members of the family and to encourage unmarried couples or single people to adhere to this system. The same applies to criteria of normality and respectability.

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[40] Pateman also points out that, in the traditional patriarchal order, the family is used as the metaphor for political order. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.82.

Their impact is so important that apparently normal practices characterizing family members may be reproduced, often unconsciously, by people who live together, either heterosexual or homosexual couples or in groups, without being married. Instead, the couple should be an intermediary element facilitating communication between equal partners; this is what the philosopher calls: "[...] une étique du couple comme lieu intermédiaire entre les individus".[41] If this was the case, the female body could be recognized as an entity in its own right. Maternity would be the expression of a choice and not of a compulsory way to enter the norms defining the only model of female identity.

According to the philosopher women will not be recognized as subjects and autonomous citizens as long as reproduction is a process in which women represent a source of power as reproducers, and as long as women's role in society is primarily defined in relation to the production of children. Children are seen as commodities society needs in order to survive, consequently the female body cannot be an entity existing as an inherent part of women's own sense of material and spiritual evolution, 'devenir

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[41] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.17. The idea of the couple functioning as a privileged space enabling partners to communicate as subjects respecting each other's difference has been further developed in *J'aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992).

matériel et spirituel'. In Irigarian terms, the destiny of the female body can be said to be governed by survival imperatives which control symbolic and cultural practices. The philosopher's opinion on the subject seems to be particularly relevant to French women. The need to reproduce is one of the main obsessions of French society; all French parties seem to share this very concern. In *Mitterrand et les Françaises:Un rendez-vous manqué*, Mariette Sineau and Jane Jenson show that Mitterrand intended to modernize familiy policies in order to create more equality between and women when he came to power in 1981. Mainly thanks to Yvette Roudy, several laws were modified or promulgated to give women the chance of having more legal power in the family. She also facilitated the retraining of women to enable them to re-enter the job market more easily. However, the Mitterrand government did not really abandon policies aiming to encourage a higher birth rate. This meant that the State intervention in the private sphere was reinforced and worked to the detriment of women.[42]

> A la fin des années Mitterrand, les différentes aides à la famille paraissent obéir à des logiques contradictoires, et on ne sait plus si elles ont pour objet de faciliter le cumul activités/maternités, ce que presque toutes les jeunes femmes aspirent à faire aujourd'hui, ou bien si, compte tenu du niveau de chômage, elles visent à soulager le marché de l'emploi de la présence d'un certain nombre de femmes

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[42] The terms used to qualify such interventions are:"politique familialiste".

actives.[43]

A precise example of reproduction oriented policies, '*politique familialiste*', was Mitterrand's tacit approval of the measures taken by Georgina Dufoix. These measures aimed to encourage women to return to the idea of large families looked after by their mother at home.

> [...] Georgina Dufoix édicte des mesures en direction des familles nombreuses... Cette mère de quatre enfants s'est attachée au cours de ses ministères successifs à réévaluer le rôle des mères de famille nombreuse, et même, pourrait-on dire, à faire du prosélytisme ("Il faut résolument faire des enfants") disait-elle, avouant qu'elle-même aurait aimé en avoir six.[44]

Georgina Dufoix's declaration and policies illustrate Irigaray's claim that, despite certain improvements regarding women's autonomy vis à vis reproduction, women are still not totally free to control their body and reproduction in view of the cultural and economic demands they have to face. It is possible, of course, to decide not to have children. But it is still very hard for many women to resist the pressures made by their male partners,

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[43] Jane Jenson, Mariette Sineau, *Mitterrand et les Françaises:Un rendez-vous manqué* (Paris:Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques,1995),pp.264-265.

[44] Jane Jenson, Mariette Sineau, *Mitterrand et les Françaises:Un rendez-vous manqué* (Paris:Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques,1995),pp.265-266.

family and society in this domain.[45] Therefore, the male economy is still in control of the female body, symbolically and politically as argued by Irigaray.

> La politique familiale voulue par François Mitterrand est décidément une illustration parfaite de ce que l'enfant est le père de l'homme.[46]

Irigaray also claims that the hierarchy of the traditional family unit has to be modified in order to place both partners on an equal footing.

> [...] il y a l'autorité du père et de la mère, autorité très dissymétrique, d'ailleurs. Le père donne ou prend le nom, les biens, les droits au spirituel, notamment dans la jonction entre la famille et la société, la nature et la culture. La mère garde la substance en tant que corps reproducteur et nourricier...Depuis ce temps... la femme devient mère dans la généalogie de son mari. Ce devoir pour elle, ce droit pour l'homme, coupe la femme de ses racines en la réenracinant dans la famille de son mari où elle doit faire substance.[47]

The crucial difference, here, is between the notion of duty and that of right. Men, as guardians of society's authority, expect women to give them children. Besides,

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[45] One example of indirect modes of persuasion used by all governments is the incentive they endeavour to give women to have a third child in order to benefit from several financial advantages such as tax relief, special mortgage rates and extra family allowance. Women who are in a difficult financial situation find it hard not to comply with such favourable terms.

[46] Jane Jenson, Mariette Sineau, *Mitterrand et les Françaises:Un rendez-vous manqué* (Paris:Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques,1995),p.267.

[47] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1987),p.145.

the expression 'give a man a child' has become part of the language. As already shown, men's expectation in this domain corresponds to society's imperatives. Carole Pateman underlines the fact that in the sexual contract characterizing all modern patriarchy, women are first and foremost 'embodied sexual beings' over which 'men claim sexual access and 'right of command over the use of women's bodies'.[48]

It could be argued, therefore, that women, on the one hand, are dispossessed from the right to direct ownership of their children who mainly have to be conceived for society's and men's needs. On the other hand, women's primary function in society, or 'duty' as mentioned by Irigaray, is still to look after their children; this a responsibility, which, even now, usually either confines them to minor roles or hinders their potential professional career.

The same sort of argument can be used as regards the female body. The independence women have acquired with contraception is, of course, vital.[49] It has given more

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[48] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.17.

[49] Contraception was only made legal, in France, in 1967, but publicity on contraception was discouraged. *Code Pénal* (Paris:Jurisprudence Générale Dalloz,1989-1990),article 317,p.210. This late legalization of contraception is perhaps one of the reason why, even in the 1990s, advertising the use of condoms, mainly to prevent the spread of Aids, is still very

freedom in their sexual life. However, the use of contraception has not changed the way men regard and treat the female body. It has given them easier access to it and has rarely given them a greater sense of responsibility as regards contraception. Although men and women nowadays seem to be more liberated regarding sexual relations, this freedom has not restored the female body to women as their own property. Irigaray makes the following point:

> Leur droit à la vie [de droit des femmes] exige qu'elles puissent disposer légalement de leurs corps et de leur subjectivité.[50]

2.3. Sexuate rights and New Techniques of Reproduction, NTR.

The use of NTR would seem to be a way of giving women the opportunity of regaining the right to self-determination as regards the control of their body. I would argue that these techniques can sometimes act as a means to transgress what is considered to be the norm of reproduction such as heterosexual intercourse. On the other hand, N.T.R can also be a way of reiterating patterns established by male economy and, once again, result in the submission of the female body to its control.

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[50] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Difféence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.97.

The use of NTR for heterosexual and lesbian women who cannot or do not want to have a child with a male partner can be seen as a form of progress towards independence. This choice enables women to break conventions and opens the door to new moral codes and legislation; it results in the development of a new social order strongly resisted by the conservative discourse of the Right and of the Church in general. However, it means that women can break out of the traditional family boundaries to use their bodies and make their own decisions despite the imperatives imposed by patriarchal authority. It is very difficult if not impossible for lesbians to have access to NTR within the existing medical organizations but they can use these processes by coming to an agreement with a private sperm donor, thus transgressing the system even more critically. Most single women or lesbians cannot adopt or foster children because they are not part of a traditional family unit.

In many cases, when fostering is allowed, only mentally or physically impaired children are put into the care of gay or lesbian couples. Such decisions underline the extent to which reproduction and parenting can become a discriminatory practice.[51]

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[51] This issue will be critically assessed in relation to the question of transgression, lesbianism and Irigaray's advocacy for sexuate rights in chapter Four.

Irigaray has not addressed these issues. This is partly due to the fact that she thinks these problems will be solved by the implementation of a sexuate culture in contemporary society.[52]

NTR, according to the philosopher, do not bring women autonomy. Firstly because obtaining sperm from men still means that women have to depend on them. Irigaray also adds that, resorting to assisted reproduction is a way of reducing women to what she calls 'naturalism': "Or y a-t-il pire naturalisme que cette conception par une semence anonyme séparée du sujet qui l'a engendrée."[53] What Irigaray means here, is that even if women use NTR to have a child, they still have to resort to natural means of production, that is the use of sperm, and secondly, women still express a need to be mothers which is the another way of falling back into the idea that women have to be mothers at all cost in order to be well-balanced.

> De plus, un enfant sans homme est toujours un enfant. La femme s'y retrouve encore et toujours mère. Et, si la liberté des femmes se définit seulement par leur capacité à se priver de l'homme dans la procréation, je trouve cette liberté bien précaire.[54]

Secondly, men's control of NTR is again a way of

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[52] This debate will also be presented in chapter Four.

[53] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.160.

[54] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.160.

manipulating women's capacity to reproduce.

> [...] les hommes ne sont pas du tout absents des technologies de reproduction. Ils y sont même extrêmement intéressés par le biais de l'argent. La prostitution fait de l'argent sur le sexe des femmes, la procréation artificielle en fait sur le ventre maternel.[55]

Thirdly, for some women, having one's own child at all cost can be seen as a form of obsessive preoccupation which, again, plays into the hands of patriarchy. Irigaray even thinks that this sort of preoccupation, when it becomes a fixation, prevents women from giving more importance to other things, such as the running of the polis or symbolic exchanges:

> Et, tant que les femmes s'occupent de leur ventre... elles (ne) s'occupent (que) de ça... L'organisation sociale, la gestion du politique, du religieux, des échanges symboliques... restent aux mains des hommes.[56]

I would agree with Irigaray that having one's natural child can become an obsession for some women. Moreover, it can also become one for men. This obsession can also seem unjustified when so many children need adopting.

> Alors pourquoi ce pathos autour d'une maternité possible ou impossible? Parce que les femmes n'ont d'autre horizon que maternel. Et il y a un risque réel que certaines femmes, qui se croient émancipées de leur nature telle qu'elle a été définie par le patriarcat, se resoumettent corps et "âme" à cette

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[55] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.160.

[56] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.160.

> variante de leur sort qui s'appelle la procréation artificielle.[57]

Desperately seeking motherhood in a male dominated economy will not help women regain control of their body. The sense of duty based on the cultural beliefs and practices revolving around the family will not be eliminated as long as women's destiny is defined by their obligation, consciously exercised or not, to become mothers. On the other hand, women's bodies can be manipulated for commercial purposes or scientific research.[58] In Irigarian terms, the only way of getting out of this deadlock would be for women to assert their right to property as citizens in their own right. They would then be entitled to regain full authority over the use of their body.[59] It would also mean that children would only be seen as an option for both men and women and not as a mode of being for women only.

Irigaray's intention is to show, in agreement with most feminists, that the female body must be reappropriated by women so that they do not feel it is an 'horizon' they

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[57] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.161.

[58] An example is the case of Italy, where older women can become pregnant at great cost. Similar practices exist in other countries, including Britain.

[59] The notions of individual rights and female citizenship are discussed in more detail in the last part of this chapter.

cannot escape. She claims that the existence and role of the female body cannot be defined in relation to men or children only. The philosopher argues that to avoid their destiny as 'embodied sexual beings' and to regain the unity which has been denied to them as long as their body has been used as a product of exchange or as a 'natural body', women need to repossess their body symbolically, culturally and politically. According to Irigaray this could be done if sexual difference was to be legitimized by sexuate rights establishing women as different but equal to men. Hence the importance the philosopher gives to 'civility' as a condition enabling 'the civil woman' to counterbalance the effects of neutrality and to take an active part in the ruling of the polis.

3. ROLE OF 'THE CIVIL WOMAN' IN SOCIETY.

In this section, I will analyse Irigaray's notion of 'civility' in terms of rights, duty and respect which will be presented as the three main principles determining the relationship between men and women. Sexuate rights will be interpreted as a process of legitimization of these principles. I will also suggest that 'civility' works as the socio-cultural expression of the social symbolic. It is important to point out that, according to the philosopher, sexuate rights are not to be confused with the abstract concept of human rights she often refers to as '*les droits de la personne*'. For Irigaray, as well as for many feminists, human rights represent the universal values which are supposed to guarantee the rights of all citizens, be they men or women. Yet, according to the feminist argument, the very universality of rights is precisely the characteristic which subsumes women's rights whilst giving the impression that these rights are guaranteed by the apparently gender-neutral aspect of citizenship. In my view, this assumption seems to be particularly justified when applied to the French republican motto: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity.

For Irigaray, it is therefore essential to rethink the role and identity of women in society based on the rights she claims for the female citizen as a civil entity,

'la femme civile'.

Irigaray does not intend to undermine the rights acquired by women during women's struggle for equality. What she proposes to do is to rethink the principles of women's rights in society by rearticulating symbolic and social practices attached to female citizenship. 'Civility' will be introduced as the realization of three stages: the erasure of the universal individual, the establishment of a legitimate status for 'the civil woman', and the reformulation of a social contract based on duty and respect for both genres.

3.1. The universal individual and 'the civil woman'.

During an interview given to Lasagni in 1988, Irigaray stated that there is no egalitarian jurisdiction in contemporary society. She added that the legislation system should be rethought in terms of sexual difference so that this system can adequately constitute the basis of human culture.[60] The very notion of rights is linked to that of equality; this, in itself, is a problem for Irigaray, as equality, as it exists, only recognizes one type of individual, the universal individual, who, as demonstrated in chapter One is Man. Gender-neutral rights

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[60] 'Pourquoi définir des droits sexués', chapter in Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.101-117.

are not an option for the philosopher since she considers, as discussed previously, that neutrality is only a way of giving women access to some of men's existing rights without giving women the possibility of being citizens in their own right. Irigaray is not alone in thinking that the concept from which the 'individual' emerges works to the detriment of women and to the advantage of the male economy. Françoise Gaspard, an ex-politician and a supporter of the movement '*Parité*' also thinks that this notion should be rethought: "Elle [la parité] conduit à dénoncer ...l'abstraction juridique qu'a été l'individu tel qu'il émerge de la Révolution". The abstraction Gaspard mentioned corresponds to the dominant order which she calls: 'l'ordre, non dit, des hommes'.[61] This point of view is reiterated by Gisèle Halimi when she critically assesses the birth of citizens'rights in France:

> Cette universalité, qui se voulait abstraite et s'appliquant à l'individu quel qu'il soit, ne visait en réalité - et Sartre l'écrivait - que *l'homme bourgeois* de 1789 et non pas la bourgeoise, *la femme*. Levons toute ambiguïté: l'universalisme et la théorie des droits de l'homme ne sont pas en cause en tant que tels, mais leurs contradictions et leur fausse abstraction... La Révolution française a bien décidé l'*exclusion* des femmes du domaine civique.
>
> Comme le dit Elizabeth G. Sledziewski, cette proclamation universelle et égalitaire joue un rôle de *verrouillage*, fait fonction de *camouflage*, opère contre la femme un véritable déni de justice. "L'universlisme est un piège pour la démocratie",

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[61] Françoise Gaspard,'De la Parité: Genèse d'un Concept, Naissance d'un Mouvement', *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*,15, no.4(1994),29-44,(p.43).

écrit-elle.[62]

Gisèle Halimi continues her argument by explaining that the French Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 stated that women could participate on an equal footing with men in the ruling of the polis, '*la direction des affaires publiques de la cité*'. She also notes that forty five years after this Declaration and thirty years after the International Convention against discrimination organized by the U.N. in 1979, women are still excluded from the main positions of responsibility and decision making.

> [...] à l'échelle mondiale, le pouvoir politique dans les Parlements est partagé entre les sexes selon le pourcentage suivant: 86% au pouvoir masculin, 14% au pouvoir féminin... Le 27 octobre 1945, les femmes votent pour la première fois et élisent une Assemblée constituante. Pourcentage d'élues: 5.7%. En 1994, soit près d'un demi-siècle plus tard, le Parlement compte, toujours, 5.7% de femmes. C'est dire la force du blocage des mentalités dans ce domaine.[63]

In France, the rigidity of patriarchal attitudes, '*le blocage des mentalités*', Halimi refers to, has a long tradition. Elizabeth Sledziewski's study of the relationship between women and the 1789 Revolution shows that during that period the function of women in society

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[62] Gisèle Halimi, *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire* (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.13-16. Reference to Elizabeth G. Sledziewski, 'L'Universalité trompeuse de la Révolution de 1789', pp.49-59, in the same book. In these quotations, the terms in italics are in italics in the text.

[63] Gisèle Halimi, 'Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire',in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.11-22,(pp.14-15).

finally became an issue. Women were no longer considered to have to be confined to the private sphere. However, this question was not really addressed since the revolutionary authorities seemed to be unable to face the implications which would result from recognizing women as active and responsible citizens. They were not prepared to embark on a project of social and cultural transformation which would change the history of French society.

> Il s'est donc agi, dans une démarche mêlant sans cesse reconnaissance et déni, de ménager... une place aux femmes dans l'espace de la république, tout en les excluant de l'exercice de la citoyenneté.[64]

These feminist analyses corroborate Irigaray's view that there is no room in the word 'citizen' for sexual difference. The identity of men and women may be defined as that of a citizen, but the notion of rights and duties which defines the apparently neutral term citizen is in fact a paradigm for the male being and the universal model he is supposed to represent. It can be said that only the male citizen can fully exercise the rights guaranteed by the status of citizen. In Irigarian terms, one can say that the citizen is a neutral being, all citizens are equal, therefore, equality goes hand in hand with neutrality. The validity of this reasoning is reinforced

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[64] Elizabeth Sledziewski, 'L'histoire de la démocratie sans les femmes',in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.49-58,(p.51).

by social order which, seemingly ignores differences between men and women when rights in general are concerned; however, when the ruling of the polis is at stake, these differences are emphasized and used as excuses to exclude women then presented as incapable of engaging in such functions.

Irigaray precisely denounces the apparent neutrality of legal entity, 'la personne civile':

> Les femmes n'ont pas droit à la parole... elles ne sont pas personnes civiles à part entière...Tant qu'elles n'ont pas d'identité civile propre, il est hélas ! normal qu'elles se plient aux seuls modèles existants, modèles soi-disant neutres, en fait masculins...l'individu neutre n'étant qu'une fiction culturelle.[65]

Neutrality erases the female subjective identity which should be part of 'the civil woman'. This is why Irigaray rejects equality when it is synonymous with neutrality. If women are to establish themselves as civil entities, '*des personnes civiles*', they must have the power to name as women and not as men's replica or representatives. This means that the principles of right and equality have to be rearticulated in terms of Sexual Difference, within the framework of a social contract.

The Irigarian idea of equality within difference for men and women can open a new horizon by giving them both the

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[65] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.89.

opportunity of entering a real dialogue outside the hierarchy imposed by duality. Becoming equal to something presupposes that one element in the equation is superior to the other; the element in a position of inferiority has to be coopted by the system guaranteeing the superiority of the former element. This does not happen in Irigaray's proposals since the terms of the equation are, from the start, different but equal, and difference is an indispensable and unavoidable facet of reality. The neutrality characterizing the universal individual does not figure in her argument. Instead, the emphasis is put on the need to position 'the civil woman' as a citizen whose rights make it impossible to ignore her existence as an autonomous and free individual.

> Pour redonner une chance subjective aux femmes - et d'ailleurs aux hommes en tant qu'hommes également - il faut aujourd'hui repasser par la question des droits attribués à l'un et l'autre sexe, droits entendus au sens juridique strict.[66]

3.2. 'Civility' and status

For Irigaray the concept of 'civility' is a way of counteracting the symbolic violence to which women have been and are still subjected. In this section, status will be interpreted as the first phase of realization of 'civility'. Irigaray's project of legitimization of the

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[66] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence: Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.73.

female citizen's status can be understood as an alternative to the very notion of citizenship as it is understood in French democracy. Freedom, Equality and Fraternity are supposed to be the three basic principles securing the status and the rights of the universal citizen. One question remains however: nowadays, does the fact that women have acquired more rights means that their status enables them to play a more active part in society?

For Irigaray, the role of 'the civil woman' in society depends on the relationship between 'civility' and sexuate rights. What she proposes to do is to restore equitable statuses for men and women, '[*une*] *identité équitable pour chaque sexe*', through the practice of Sexual Difference.[67]

A status is needed to give women 'social visibility'. The notion of independence is crucial in Irigaray's use of status. Firstly because it implies that the identity of 'the civil woman' does not correspond to a subclass of the male citizen. Secondly because the autonomy found in sexual difference has to be materialized by rights enabling women to extricate themselves from the male tutelage under which they have been placed for so long. Following Irigaray's argument, it can therefore be said that if women are to obtain a citizen's status which can give them the

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[67] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.86.

power to name in society, the symbolic meaning of this status and its social implications have to be reconciled.

Irigaray points out that the citizen's status is externally defined and regulated by the State. She regards the regulations imposed by the State's dominant power as arbitrary. I would suggest that her point of view can be justified if one accepts the idea that the status determining the limits of female citizenship in France is not seen as being restrictive. This can be explained by the fact that citizens'right to freedom and equality is taken for granted. Consequently, the implicit rules of fraternity which determine the way in which equality really works are not considered to play an important part in the implementation of individual rights in society. This line of reasoning is corroborated by the analyses of several feminist thinkers.

The historian, Geneviève Fraisse, for example, shows that one of the factors justifying the exclusion of women as citizens in their own right, especially as regards what I have referred to as the power to name, can be explained by the Salic Law dating back to Clovis the first. This law denied women the right to inherit land and in the 16th and 17th centuries it was used to exclude women from succession to the throne. The principles of this Law were repeated in the 1791 and 1871 Constitutions. Geneviève Fraisse

stressed the importance of the Salic Law positing men as the only guardians of the symbolic power which was attached to ownership and to the right of succession. According to her, the symbolic character of this law slowly entered the collective unconscious and became a common cultural practice justifying various forms of discrimination against women in French society, particularly in the case of political roles.

> L'hypothèse est séduisante: il y aurait comme une survivance de pratiques féodales, image du fief à travers la circonscription électorale, image du pouvoir politique comme d'une possession symbolique, évidemment avant tout masculine; la discrimination envers les femmes se justifiant par la nécessité de protéger ce pouvoir symbolique. L'hypothèse m'a séduite car elle peut expliquer que l'inclusion politique progressive des femmes bute sur le défaut de députation, que la citoyenneté des femmes n'implique aucune continuité entre participation et représentation. L'explication serait celle d'une tension entre une République, jeune encore, et le poids de la tradition féodale.[68]

Sexual difference therefore plays a determining role in the definition of the rights guaranteeing the full exercise of citizenship. It is based on what Irigaray would call the power of possession or 'having', '*l'avoir*', which in this context can be interpreted as the right to ownership, rather than on the mode of 'being', '*l'être*', which could be understood, here, as the respect for the

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[68] Geneviève Fraisse, *Muse de la Raison:Démocratie et exclusion des Femmes en France* (Paris:Gallimard,1995),pp.345-347. Maurice Maschineau also agrees with this interpretation to which he refers in: Maurice Maschineau in his recent book, *Après Vous Messieurs:Le Pouvoir et les Femmes*(Paris:Calman-Levy,1996).

individual as a legitimate citizen in his or her own right.

Irigaray's denunciation of the power of 'having' which characterizes patriarchal economy, symbolically and socially, is similar to the position adopted by Elizabeth Sledziewski who underlines the importance of the role of ownership in the concept of citizenship. She claims that although the citizen's rights are absolute when they are related to the universal individual, they become relative when they apply to the citizen as a social agent.

In other words, in theory, all citizens are supposed to benefit from the same rights because they are all equal and therefore are all entitled to the same status. However, Sledziewski argues that the intention of a legally constituted state, '*l'Etat de droit*', is not to guarantee all citizens the same opportunity of implementing these rights. This can be explained by the fact that the abstraction of the universal value defining the citizen's rights cannot function when citizens are involved in power relations and exchanges based on their capacity of production. "C'est leur 'utilité', autrement dit leur fonction socio-économique, qui détermine leur degré de capacité... ou d'incapacité".[69] The discrepancy between

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[69] Elizabeth Sledziewski, 'L'Histoire de la démocratie sans les femmes' in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.49-58,(p.53).

the absolute value of a status and its power of realization in society therefore explains why women do not have the power to name in society:

> Comme le feront par la suite les dispositions révolutionnaires codifiant le droit de propriété... la Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen d'août 1789 articule très étroitement, dans un bloc juridique inentamable, l'absolu du droit subjectif individuel et le relatif de l'acteur social, assujetti aux lois et aux règles objectives de la cité ainsi qu'au système des rapports de production...C'est ... aussi ce qui permet aux femmes de bénéficier pleinement des droits de l'homme mais pas de ceux du citoyen...Les adversaires de l'admission des femmes au droit de cité... ont logiquement mis en avant cette intime conjonction de l'être individuel et de l'être social dans la personnalité du sujet de droit moderne.[70]

This point of view is illustrated by the following example: in France, before 1965, married women did not have the right to get a job, open their own bank account and control their own estate without their husband's consent.

However, the status allocated to women in history has evolved quite dramatically during the last 25 years. The fact that women now enjoy more rights obviously does not mean that they were not capable of exercising these rights before. It simply means that the patriarchal obligations and the capitalist economic imperatives did not need them, or want them, rather, to participate in social life as

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[70] Elisabeth Sledziewski, 'L'Histoire de la démocratie sans les femmes' in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.49-58,(pp.52-55).

actively as they do now. It is also important to note that these developments could not be avoided due to the political activism of pressure groups such as the feminist movements often supported by some Liberals or the progressive Left.

Women in France, for example, have acquired more rights under the socialist governments from May 1981 until May 1995 than they have ever had before.[71] These rights have contributed to the evolution of women's social status in society by giving them more freedom and responsibility. However, women still have not completely obtained the power to name, that is to say, the possibility of transposing the power given by a status of subject in the symbolic into a position of legitimate authority in society. It is easier to acquire rights useful or necessary to the smooth running of society than it is to obtain rights legitimizing the role of women as citizens in their own right. In 1983, for example, equal opportunity policies became obligatory, thanks to a new law called '*la Loi Roudy*'. Although these policies helped to improve the integration of women in the workplace and in the political arena, the most important

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[71] Refer to appendix 2 for details of various laws relevant to women's rights since 1982.

positions remained and still remain men's prerogative. Patriarchal domination controlling social order has therefore not been really disrupted by what can be seen as the acceptance or the cooption of women rather than a desire to start an authentic cooperation between men and women. The following examples justify this statement. In 1945, women made up 5.7% of the Constituent Assembly and in 1994 women made up 5.7% of the Parliament.[72] In 1993, only three women were part of the Balladur government. Apart from Simone Veil who was in charge of Social Affairs, '*Affaires Sociales, Santé et Ville*', none of them occupied an important post in his government. Michèle Alliot-Marie was in charge of a ministry dedicated to young people and sport, '*Jeunesse et Sport*', and Lucette Michaux-Chevry was minister of state for Human Rights, '*Action humanitaire et Droits de l'homme*'.[73] This type of limitation means that women are not recognized, or maybe more to the point, not accepted as being capable of participating in the ruling of the polis. This was clearly the case of the Prime Minister, Edith Cresson, who only remained in office for less than a year, from the 15th of May 1991 until the 2nd of April 1992, due to heavy pressures from all parties

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[72] Gisèle Halimi, 'Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire',in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),p.15.

[73] Jane Jenson & Mariette Sineau, *Mitterrand et Les Femmes, Un rendez-vous manqué*(Paris:Presse de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques,1995),p.358.

including her own; she was also submitted to constant denigration from the media who presented her firstly as a woman and secondly as a Prime Minister.[74]

It would seem that getting away from the traditional identity imposed on women is practically impossible. What Irigaray proposes is to extract women from the restrictive models of citizenship dictated by patriarchal order and to position female citizens as autonomous and responsible individuals, " des citoyennes adultes et responsables", who find their raison d'être in and by themselves.[75] Female citizens should be able to enjoy the equality and freedom to which all citizens are entitled in a democratic society, without being subsumed by the implicit dominance contained in the third term of the French republican motto: Fraternity. It could therefore be argued, in agreement with Irigaray, that if sexuate rights were part of the citizen's status and if the implementation of sexuate rights meant that men had to formally recognize women's role as citizens in their own right, '*l'admission des femmes au droit de cité*', mechanisms of restriction aiming to limit or exclude women could no longer be legitimately

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[74] These comments are confirmed by several studies on the role of Edith Cresson as a Prime Minister. The one I refer to here is that of Elizabeth Schmela, *Edith Cresson:La Femme Piégée*(Paris:Flammarion,1993). Also refer to page 69 for more comments on Edith Cresson.

[75] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.95.

imposed.[76]

> C'est le non accès, pour elles, au symbolique qui établit l'ordre social. Mettant en rapport, en relations, les hommes entre eux, les femmes ne réalisent cette fonction qu'en y abandonnant leur droit à la parole.[77]

This process could only take place if the socio-cultural patterns determining the status of female citizens were not reiterated in the social order and hence in the collective unconscious.

3.3 'Civility', contract and visibility.

I would suggest that 'civility', in its second stage of realization, can be interpreted as a form of contract between men and women. According to the philosopher, to achieve social visibility, women must act as legally recognized spokespersons for society. This implies that female citizens must renegotiate the terms of the sexual and social contract. Only then would equality and solidarity between all citizens become really meaningful.

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[76] The expression: '*l'admission des femmes au droit de cité*' was first used by Condorcet in 1790, in an article entitled 'Sur l'admission des femmes au droit de cité'. Sledziewski refers to Condorcet's statement as follows: 'Condorcet... souligna que le législateur avait "violé le principe de l'égalité des droits en privant tranquillement la moitié du genre humain de celui de concourir à la formation des lois, en excluant les femmes de la cité"'. Quotation taken from Elisabeth Sledziewski, 'L'Histoire de la démocratie sans les femmes' in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.49-58, p.57. This expression has since been used by many feminists.

[77] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.184.

Irigaray states that it is women's responsibility to act as facilitators between society as a whole and dominant forces in order to generate the required changes. "[...] leur fonction [est une fonction] de régulation vis-à-vis de l'ordre social".[78] But is this a realistic proposition when, society as it exists, is still essentially controlled and regulated by patriarchal imperatives?

Following my assumption that Irigaray's emphasis on 'civility' can be understood as an attempt to propose a model of contract between men and women, I will analyse her recommendations by concentrating mainly on the resulting moral and cultural practices she advocates. I will also compare her position to that of other feminist suggestions in the domain of contract.

3.3.1. 'Civility', respect and duty.

For Irigaray, the social contract can only function democratically if relations of 'civility' are regulated by the following guidelines: respect for nature by men and women; as already demonstrated, this presupposes that men have to accept that nature is also part of their identity. Respect for the female body's capacity to reproduce, for the female citizen's integrity and for women's ownership

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[78] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique*(Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.94.

of their bodies, in other words, for rights relevant to female genealogy. Finally, recognition that the role of 'civility' is to ascertain the status of 'the civil woman' which must be legitimized in its own right and included as an integral part of the social contract between men and women.

> Nous... avons besoin d'une majorité civile au féminin, c'est à dire de la reconnaissance et de l'aide d'une communauté civile qui nous donne des droits et des responsabilités au sein des couples, au sein des familles, mais aussi dans tous les lieux publics. La démocratie correspond à la souveraineté de chaque citoyen. Ni le dictionnaire ni le code civil n'ont prévu que les citoyens étaient, pour plus de la moitié, des citoyennes. Le premier droit à établir, à rétablir pour entrer dans un régime démocratique, est le droit à exister ou à être souverainement soi-même.[79]

In my view, all the modifications Irigaray proposes could be interpreted in contractual terms. They could be inscribed in the civil code as sexuate rights since they concern men's identity as well as women's identity. This hypothesis seems to be justified by Irigaray's latest pieces of writing published since 1992. In *Le Temps de la Différence* the philosopher only briefly refers to the possibility of including the notion of sexuate rights in a modified civil code. However, her desire to formalize her suggestions becomes more explicit in papers or interviews recently given. In a special edition of

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[79] Luce Irigaray, 'Citoyenne et élue:un pouvoir différent?', in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.101-108(p.106-107).

Les Lettres Françaises entitled 'Où est passé le féminisme' published in 1992, Irigaray makes the following statement:

> [...] celles-ci [les femmes] doivent obtenir une législation qui leur donne droit à l'autonomie réelle, soit à la participation et à la gestion de la société civile... Les femmes politiques devraient de nos jours, plus encore que les hommes à cause de la nouveauté de ce qui est à penser, définir un programme bien argumenté à partir de l'identité féminine.[80]

Irigaray sees women's participation in the making of major decisions concerning the evolution of society as a way of reaching a stage of maturity which she calls '*la majorité civile*'. The notion of majority she alludes to demonstrates that women's role in politics is crucial.

> Que les femmes s'assistent dans l'accès à la maturité privée ou publique est de nos jours indispensable, cela restera toujours souhaitable, mais cette assistance ne peut se substituer à une identité civilement définie...
>
> Toute relation sociale est toujours à quelque titre affaire de droits et de devoirs civils....Exercer la politique consiste, selon moi, à faire respecter les droits et les devoirs de chacun et de chacune, du moins en régime démocratique. Cette gestion du politique nécessite la mise en place d'un nouveau code civil, notamment en matière de respect du droit des personnes.[81]

I would suggest that Irigaray expects female

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[80] Interview given by Luce Irigaray for the magazine *Les Lettres Françaises:Où est Passé le Féminisme*, 18 March 1992,p.8.

[81] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),pp.94-98.

politicians to transpose the symbolic order of female genealogy into the terms of the social contract by indicating that women in general are legitimately entitled to be represented and act as 'civil women '. This assertion raises the issue of equal opportunity policies and quotas the philosopher episodically mentions.

Principles of equal opportunity implies that access to equality of status, salary and power of decision should be guaranteed by a moral and civil contract. Irigaray does think that equal opportunity policies should be applied. She also makes it clear that quotas can prove to be necessary:

> Il est donc simplement conséquent qu'elles [les femmes] soient représentées à 50% (au moins...) au Parlement, comme dans tous les lieux de décisions publiques les concernant. A défaut de cette participation, elles sont encore et toujours considérées comme filles mineures de la famille, qu'il s'agisse de la famille au sens strict, de la nation, de la communauté internationale.[82]

However, Irigaray sees equal opportunity policies and quotas as a strategy rather than as an end in itself. According to the philosopher, women can only reach the stage of symbolic or social maturity, '*majorité civile*', by imposing female citizenship, '*la citoyenneté au féminin*'

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[82] Interview given by Luce Irigaray for the magazine *Les Lettres Françaises:Où est Passé le Féminisme*, 18 March 1992,p.8.

as a force which has to be reckoned with.[83]

One cannot but agree with Irigaray when the following question is raised: how successful are women who do not wish to walk in the footsteps of men or adhere to the feminine identity imposed by the dominant culture? In France, for example, as in most latin countries, women have to represent Woman. The idea of a real woman corresponds, first and foremost, to Woman. *'La Femme Française'* regularly makes the headlines in the press. This is the case with the symbolic Marianne, or with women such as Catherine Deneuve who embodies feminity, elegance, sex-appeal, gentleness, reserve and of course, the famous 'chic' every French woman is supposed to have naturally.[84]

On the other hand, there are women such as Edith Cresson who did not exactly correspond to the feminine stereotypes of the French woman. Her body language or the language she used were not always those expected from a feminine woman, let alone from the self-controlled tone female politicians are supposed to adopt. Journalists would take great pleasure in focusing their cameras on her

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[83] Expression used in the context of this debate in Luce Irigaray, 'Citoyenne et élue:un pouvoir différent?', in *Femmes: Moitié de la Terre, Moitié du Pouvoir:Plaidoyer pour une Démocratie Paritaire*, ed. by Gisèle Halimi (Paris:Gallimard,1994),pp.101-108(p.106-107).

[84] It is interesting to note that Catherine Deneuve was used as a model for the latest portrayal of Marianne.

legs when she moved or talked. Her critics worked very hard to make her lose credibility, be they from the press, from the political arena or from her own party who never stopped undermining her actions or blocking her decisions.[85]

These examples show the necessity of reformulating the rules of the social contract which should be negotiated by two parties, women and men, positioned as equal forces. In Irigarian terms, duty and mutual respect could then work as the basis on which cooperation and exchange between male and female citizens could take place.

> Les femmes, comme les hommes d'ailleurs, ont besoin de lois qui leur soient adaptées. Cela signifie que 50% de femmes au Parlement votant des lois non appropriées aux nécessités des femmes en tant que telles ne représentent pas les intérêts réels des femmes. Elles exercent un pouvoir, parfois au détriment de celles qu'elles sont supposées représenter. La question n'est donc pas simplement qu'il y ait des femmes au Parlement. Elle est que le Parlement vote des décisions qui, au moins par moitié, représentent les nécessités et droits des femmes. Ces 50% peuvent se trouver parmi les votes des femmes et ceux des hommes.[86]

3.3.2. 'Civility' and society as mediator, '*un Tiers*'.

It would seem that 'civility' can also be presented as a form of social contract when one refers to Irigaray's

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[85] Elizabeth Schemla, *Edith Cresson: La femme piégée* (Paris:Flammarion,1993).

[86] Interview given by Luce Irigaray for the magazine *Les Lettres Françaises:Où est Passé le Féminisme*, 18 March 1992,p.8.

proposition to call on society as a mediator, '*un Tiers*'. Society's role would then be to guarantee and protect the impartiality of the contract between men and women.

The idea of using society as a form of Third Party is interesting because it means that the position of the plaintiff, that is to say, of women in most cases, as well as that of the prosecution representing men, would be mediated not by a judge, judges are still often men, or by a jury who would probably reflect the opinion of the dominant ideology in its majority, but by an independent guarantor of sexual difference. Irigaray refers to the imbalance of power between men and women, '*les personnes*', and to the oppressive hierarchy imposed on both men and women, not forgetting that, according to her, most men are part of the male economy, consciously or not giving priority to possession and power, '*l'avoir*'. The term possession returns to the idea that women are used as products of exchange or as symbols which maintain them in a position of inferiority or inequality. The power to name does not figure in this scenario. Irigaray proposes a different model of society, '*société civile*', the role of which would be to make sure that exchanges are based on solidarity between male and female citizens.

> [...] la société civile... à l'époque où nous vivons, exige que les relations publiques soient des lieux de réciprocité entre les individus. Il ne convient pas que le seul médiateur civil soit l'argent. Il ne convient pas que les relations entre les personnes soient sans cesse conflictuelles et hiérarchisées par

> des pouvoirs liés à la possession d'objets et non aux qualités et à l'expérience des personnes.[87]

Irigaray does not specify what she means exactly by '*société civile*'. It seems to me that when she refers to issues relating specifically to the impact the family has on women's life, this expression can be understood in the Hegelian-Marxist sense, that is to say, as the private sphere distinct from the state, and from which women's identity and role in society are defined. In this context, and as shown in chapter One, '*la société civile*' would be considered to be one of the mechanisms of the symbolic order which deny women the possibility of positing themselves as legitimate subjects and therefore as citizens in their own right. '*La société civile*' can also be understood as a type of 'civic society', that is to say, the realm of the state, with its institutions and principles of citizenship consisting of rights and duties determined by the law. As shown in the overall argument of this thesis, the important point is to note that, for Irigaray, the symbolic and the social tend to be assimilated to prove that subjectivity and social agency are interdependent. Hence the importance of the social-symbolic I have presented as Irigaray's alternative to the dominance of patriarchal order.

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[87] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Révolution Pacifique* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1989)pp.98-100.

Another reason why Irigaray wishes to use society as a Third Party is to take the focus of accusation away from women. The philosopher claims that society, as a whole, should be held responsible for certain crimes against women such as rape, incest or abduction of children by fathers. When women accuse men of rape, they are victims and yet they can still be portrayed as having provoked it. When they accuse their partner or husband of violence they are still presented as the guilty party. What is more, Irigaray undelines the fact that to always be in a position of accusation does not help creating better relations with men.

> Or il n'est souhaitable, ni pour les femmes ni pour les relations entre les sexes, que les femmes lésées soient mises en position de simple accusatrices. Si des droits civils existent pour les femmes, c'est la société tout entière qui sera lésée en cas de viol ou toutes formes de violences infligées aux femmes; c'est elle qui sera donc plaignante ou co-plaignante contre le dommage causé à une des personnes qui la composent.[88]

The fact that rape could become an assault on society would not necessarily undermine the argument that women should have sole possession and responsibility for their own bodies. It would mean that it is society's moral duty to formalize the integrity of the female body. It would also imply that society has to legally protect the female body, like any other property belonging to an individual,

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[88] Luce Irigaray, *Je,Tu,Nous:Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),pp.109-110.

be it male or female. It could be said that, in many cases, rape takes place because men implicitly consider that in a patriarchal society the purpose of the female body is to reproduce and to satisfy their sexual needs. Therefore, it is often difficult for men to admit that sexual violence, especially within marriage, is classified as a crime. The role of associations specialized in the defence of women who are victims of sexual violence committed by men show how important the issue has become. As legally recognized agencies of the state, they cannot be ignored. Their action officializes women's denunciation of male symbolic and physical violence. If rape was to be sanctioned as an assault against society, society would stand as the guilty party in the eyes of the law. Society would have to address the contradiction between its patriarchal ideology and the laws aiming to recognize the inviolability of the female body.

Nevertheless, there can also be problems with society acting as the party responsible for violence against women. For instance, men's responsibility could appear to be lessened, if they were also thought to be the victims of the dominant system. Men could even advocate part-responsibility since they are also part of the collective unconscious which carries the dominant ideology through the cultural practices they have incorporated.

Another problem with society acting as the party responsible for crime against women, is that it might be more difficult to raise awareness between women to fight against the system which may then seem overwhelming, despite the support available from various associations. In a way, as far as women may be considered to participate in the transmission of traditional patriarchal values, they could also be held responsible for crimes committed by their sons. In that case, mothers would have to question the way they relate to and educate their children. Women may find themselves, once more, in a position of vulnerability. On the other hand, they may be motivated enough by the sensitivity of the situation to demand a radical change in social and cultural practices regarding women in general. Such an approach would demand changes involving representation of women in the media, in works of art, in representation of rape in films, and compulsory use of a non-sexist language. These are just a few examples amongst many others which are briefly mentioned by Irigaray and are also part of the current feminist agenda.

3.4. 'Civility' and the Sexual Contract.

Some of the issues I have raised in my interpretation of 'civility' discussed in terms of a contract materializing sexual difference also appear in Pateman's

The Sexual Contract. She presents an argument which can be said to have some similarities with that of Irigaray's in this domain. Pateman advocates that the notion of the individual is a patriarchal construct based on the following line of reasoning. She states that if all individuals are equal because they are individuals, the same rights must apply, in the same way, to all individuals. Pateman encompasses the notion of status in that of the individual. A and B are abstract representations of citizens. Consequently, the idea that patriarchy is a system of domination oppressing women is no longer valid as it is precisely its very existence, reinforced by capitalism, which is supposed to guarantee the rights of all equal individuals, including women. Therefore, A and B become interchangeable. And this interchangeability reinforces the right of the individual as owner. He, and more precisely, she, is the owner of a disembodied identity.

> If women had been merely excluded from civil life, like slaves, or wives when coverture held sway, the character of the problem would have been self-evident. But women have been incorporated into a civil order in which their freedom is apparently guaranteed, a guarantee renewed with each telling of the story of the social contract in the language of the individual.[89]

Sexual difference as a specific part of an individual status therefore disappears in the generality of the terms of the contract binding the individual to civil society.

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[89] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.222.

Because the category of the universal individual, Man, includes that of woman, female identity is latent but repressed. But if the citizen has no specific identity according to the social contract, Pateman, like Irigaray, also argues that the disembodied citizen is in fact always a replica of the male citizen who can be duplicated endlessly. Besides, as already demonstrated by Halimi, Sledzwiesky and Irigaray in her critique of the construction of female identity in Western Thought, the female citizen can also be an inferior version of the initial model of male citizenship .

It seems that for Pateman, as in the Irigarian analysis of 'having', '*l'avoir*', the principles of ownership characterize the rights of the universal citizen. They act as the privileged term in the trilogy: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity. Fraternity is the element which determines the terms and conditions of freedom and equality. Fraternity can also be interpreted as a 'universal community' which decides how marriage or prostitution, for example, should function to serve the brother's interests.[90]

> The marriage and prostitution contracts, contracts to which women are necessarily a party, have always been tainted by the odour of slavery... Feminist criticism of the two contracts usually proceeds along the lines of socialist criticism of the employment contract- but without the assistance of the idea of wage slavery... the political fiction of labour power, property in the person, is tacitly accepted, and the

[90] The expression 'universal community' comes from Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.224.

> paradoxes of women and contract and the contradiction of slavery then continue to be played out.[91]

According to Pateman, 'the brotherhood of men' has replaced the rule of fathers in the modern civil order.

> [...] fraternity is held to be merely a metaphor for the universal bonds of humankind, for community, solidarity or fellowship... Fraternity is seen as a free union, and its proponents insist that 'fraternity' implies the existence of communal bonds that are civil or public, not confined to assignable persons, and that are freely chosen.[92]

The author, by looking at different theories on contract and fraternity shows that because the idea of fraternity is universal, it is an empty abstraction which has no room for any sort of specificity, be it sexual or ethnic. But the most important point is the following:

> The universal bonds of contract and citizenship are well established, and what is at issue is not so much civil fraternity... as the bonds of the fraternities that give meaning and worth to a formally equal civil status.[93]

The 'meaning and worth' of the equal status given to civil society by the brothers are justified in the male discourse by the fact that women only give birth to a male or female individual, whilst men give birth to an abstract body, that of civil society. By appropriating the concept of birth, men justify the right to create all contracts which control

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[91] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.231.

[92] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.78.

[93] Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.81.

civil society, the most crucial being the sexual contract.

Therefore, the initial contract which supposedly guarantees the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity for all, sets its rules for the public and the private spheres.[94] It confirms that men must have legal access to women to procreate. Women are the objects of the contract, carrying a social value. They are not the contract makers. One objection raised by Pateman to the assumption that women are only objects is that they are also parties in the marriage contract. I would argue that the marriage contract does not give them access to fraternity, 'the foundation of civil life'.[95] The inequality of their status is emphasized by the sexual division of roles in marriage, as pointed out by Irigaray.

Pateman also stresses that marriage is still one of the best way of benefitting from civil society's protection for women with children. I would like to point out that this is true for the majority of married women but certainly not the case for single mothers, or divorced mothers, many of whom are presently living below the poverty line. Civil society cannot guarantee the protection to which all

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[94] Based on Pateman's comments, Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.110.

[95] Expression taken from Pateman in Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge:Polity Press,1988),p.114.

individuals are supposedly entitled. Single mothers do not fit in the models determined by the terms of the contract. The fact that the Welfare State can no longer cope with the financial burden represented by single parents only reinforces and justifies the moral stance adopted by the brothers. Marriage and, implicitly, reproduction are at the root of social order; any other arrangement is disruptive if not threatening for the system guaranteed in the contract. The conservative government in the UK has now passed a new law obliging married partners to undergo counselling for one year before they can obtain a divorce. This process can be seen as another way of replacing the unsuccessful and costly attempt to impose the Child Protection Agency. In other words, divorce must be avoided at all costs and single parents are just as undesirable. This new law is not motivated by the child's interests, as advocated by the government; it is purely based on economic reasons and on the desire to go back to the moral codes which are part of the initial sexual contract.

Pateman's conclusion is not dissimilar to Irigaray's. She analyses in terms of contract and slavery what Irigaray denounces in terms of loss of identity and power, which I have interpreted in this thesis as symbolic violence. However, if one agrees with Pateman that the terms of the social contract are flawed from the start, how can we rely on society as a whole to act as a mediator between men and

women to guarantee the implementation of sexuate rights? Unless institutions change radically, which is what Irigaray would like to see, and as long as the civil contract is made by men who create this contract as a fraternal pact legitimized by society as suggested by Pateman, there does not seem to be any easy way of instigating changes enabling women to assert themselves as civil women. Their right to freedom and equality will remain artificial rights undermined by the tacit authority of the brothers. From this perspective, Irigaray's suggestion that a contract guaranteeing 'civility' and sexuate rights may rehabilitate the female citizen, seems to be a plausible alternative.

However, not all feminists would agree with this. A critique of Irigaray's propositions relevant to the legislation of sexuate rights has been made by Maryse Guerlais. She argues that advocating rights specific to women amounts to constructing the reverse of patriarchal discourse:

> [...] la différence-femme propose une méthode d'étude de la psychanalyse et définit la démarche à laquelle demeure attachée L.I.: ce qui se présente au premier abord comme une critique culturelle du patriarcat s'inverse en son contraire.[96]

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[96] Maryse Guerlais, 'Vers une nouvelle idéologie du droit statutaire: *Le Temps de la Différence* de Luce Irigaray', in *Nouvelles Questions Féministes: Particularisme et Universalisme*,16-17-18,1991,63-93..

I would argue that this interpretation of Luce Irigaray is, in several parts, a misreading of the text. Firstly, because Guerlais does not take into account, or misunderstands, the meaning Irigaray gives to subjectivity; her critique does not refer to the Lacanian context deconstructed by Irigaray and used by the philosopher as a basis for her defence in favour of a 'female speaking subject'. Secondly, Guerlais argues that giving women their own specific civil identity is equivalent to cancelling out the rights they have already acquired. This is not what Irigaray has set out to do. On several occasions in her work, Irigaray has specified that the rights acquired by women have to be defended if not preserved or certainly improved.[97] However, as already discussed, Irigaray underlines the importance of linking and adapting these rights to women's needs and not to society's imperatives. Like many other feminists she rejects the concept of the neutral individual to which women have to submit in order to have access to the rights to which they are entitled. Guerlais also misreads Irigaray's text when she argues that the notion of sexuate rights becomes a way of universalizing rights and hence of challenging existing rights. This reasoning does not stand as Irigaray has clearly demonstrated, since *Speculum*, that

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[97] "Les femmes seront représentées à égalité dans tous les lieux de décision civiles ou religieuses[...]." Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.111.

the very notion of universalism, in the form Western Thought has given it, is in fact, a disguised means of oppression. As shown in chapter One, this form of dominance can be identified as an act of symbolic violence and therefore counteracted by an alternative discourse. As advocated in *J'Aime à Toi*, Irigaray claims that universalism should be the representation of two speaking subjects, the male and female subjects, whose legitimate status in the symbolic and in society would give them both the power to be equally represented in a social contract based on 'civility'.

It is therefore necessary to replace Irigaray's latest propositions on sexuate rights in the context in which her whole work is situated. None of her statements or suggestions can be read as essentialist and retrograde if one takes into account her attempt to give the symbolic a political context to give the civil woman a social reality. In my view, one can disagree with her propositions because they may seem utopic at times but they cannot be interpreted as a denial of the rights already acquired by women. The reorientation and the defence of female specificity do not negate women's rights; they endeavour to question patriarchal society and to propose a different way of negotiating rights for men and women within the dominant order. By choosing the word negotiate, I therefore place Irigaray's discourse within the realm of

reality. No radical change can take place outside the existing system. Moreover, and in agreement with Irigaray I would also argue that acquiring equality by speaking the language of neutrality is not a form of long term progress either. This view is all the more valid since it is endorsed by other feminists such as Halimi, Sledziewski and many others.

Conclusion

At the end of this debate one can only conclude that there does not seem to be an easy answer to the question of sexuate rights. Would they really give 'the civil woman' the possibility of having a status reflecting her own identity as a female subject? Would they enable her, in her legitimate position of citizen in her own right, to renegotiate the contract made by the brothers? And finally, would they guarantee her right to equal access to the power to name in the polis?

On the one hand, one is tempted to adhere to Irigaray's propositions which could lead to the establishment of freedom, equality and solidarity as the foundation for a culture of 'civility'. But how realistic is this project? Irigaray's wish to implement sexuate rights is justified by the logic of her argument: if the status of the female citizen is not legitimized by its inscription in the civil code, no progress will ever take place. Even if some of the rights claimed by the philosopher seem to be extreme, such as privileged rights for mothers, it is nevertheless a risk worth taking to ensure that women can uncover the arbitrariness of the apparently neutral principles which negate their access to full citizenship.

On the other hand, the idea of the social symbolic is

also attractive as it politicizes the debate on symbolic construction identity. The social symbolic then functions as the framework for a culture involving a 'triple dialectical' process: "a dialectic specific to men", "a dialectic specific to women", and "a dialectic specific to the relationship men and women have with each other as well as with the community in which they live".[98] This is what Irigaray calls a sexuate culture, presented as the only way of constructing a harmonious future in society, or of starting a 'pacific revolution'.

But one problem remains: that of the very concept of 'the civil woman'. Does 'the civil woman' encompass all forms of female identity? If so, do the politics of Sexual Difference overstep the mark by disregarding differences between women? These points will be discussed in the next chapter by looking at the way in which the rights claimed for 'the civil woman' can apply to one category of women, lesbians.

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[98] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence:Pour une Culture de la Différence*(Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.55.

CHAPTER 4

'THE CIVIL WOMAN' AND LESBIAN CITIZENSHIP.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, mainly under the influence of black and lesbian feminists, white heterosexual feminist thought started to recognize the importance of differences between women. The acknowledgement of such an issue now means that thinking about a universal female identity and the homogeneity of women's experience as the essential rallying point for feminists seems more and more difficult if not impossible. This chapter will therefore discuss the relevance of Irigaray's propositions regarding female subjectivity and 'the civil woman' by finding out to what extent lesbians can benefit from female genealogy and sexuate rights. Can Irigaray's approach be considered to be too global and hence appear to subsume differences between women or can her claim for a culture of Sexual Difference be referred to as a guideline to be used to legitimize lesbian subjectivity and lesbian citizenship?

In this debate, Irigaray's theory of the social symbolic will be used to analyse two areas of lesbians'existence: sexual subjectivity and social agency. Subjectivity and agency will be analysed in terms of space and position. I will interpret the former as a locus situated in the domain of the symbolic and therefore question the role and need for a female subjectivity specific to lesbian identity. On the other hand, I will discuss the idea of position as a form of empowerment

related to lesbian citizenship.

The symbolic will be studied here in relation to sexuality since lesbian sexuality and desire can be understood as two of the most definite elements differentiating lesbians from heterosexual women. I will refer to Irigaray's theory of 'the two lips' and its corollary, contiguity, to decide if the space offered by this particular theoretical point of Irigaray's work offers lesbians the possiblity of situating themselves within her discourse.

Four main parts will structure this debate: firstly, the Irigarian concept of 'the two lips' will be explained by replacing it in the context of the traditional psychoanalytic perspective. Secondly, the possibility of constructing a space for female sexual subjects will be explored by looking at the role of contiguity. Thirdly, contiguity will be presented as a space for autonomy and fluidity in lesbian sexual identity. Two areas will be contrasted to analyse the construction of the lesbian sexual subject: the female homosexual in traditional psychoanalysis, followed by fluidity and lesbian identity and agency. In the fourth section of this chapter, the rights claimed by Irigaray for 'the civil woman' will be discussed by assessing their pertinence to the positioning of lesbians as citizens in their own right. Two key stages

will be dealt with: the application of sexuate rights to lesbians and the role of 'the civil woman' in the construction of lesbian citizenship.

1. THE IRIGARIAN CONCEPT OF 'THE TWO LIPS' AND TRADITIONAL PSYCHOANALYSIS.

The metaphor of 'the two lips' is interesting because it marks Irigaray's wish to propose a way out of the male economy of sexual desire. In a chapter entitled, 'Quand nos lèvres se parlent', Irigaray, in a very eloquent and poetic text, uses the metaphor of 'the two lips' to show how it is possible for women to experience sexuality as independent agents, that is to say, outside the phallocentric discourse, especially that of Freud and Lacan.

The metaphor of 'the two lips' is used by Irigaray as a response to the Lacanian model of female sexuality. Irigaray offers a different model of representation claiming that female pleasure can be multiple, limitless, creative and active. The aim of this metaphor is to displace the boundaries to which female sexuality has been confined. The figure of 'the two lips' is also used to enable women to reclaim their sexuality as a way of fighting self-disaffection and estrangement from other women. 'The two lips' can in no way be read as a biological interpretation of female sexual identity, as pointed out by several feminist theorists such as Fuss and Braidotti. "Irigaray's production of an apparently essentializing notion of female sexuality functions strategically as a

reversal and displacement of Lacan's phallomorphism".[1] "[...] 'the two lips' is 'chosen for its value of metaphorical subversion, in response to the Lacanian image of the black hole".[2]

Grosz reinforces the point made by other feminists:

> Irigaray's project can be interpreted as a contestation of patriarchal representations at the level of cultural representation itself. The two lips is a manoeuvre to develop a different image of model of female sexuality... Her purpose is to displace male models, rather than to accurately reflect what female sexuality really is.[3]

Whitford not only agrees with these interpretations but she also reads 'the two lips' as a symbolic rearticulation of the relation between women as mothers and daughters:

> By conceptualizing relations between women in terms of the two lips, Irigaray is proposing a metonymic, subject to subject relationship between women, based on contiguity or metonymic identification, but no longer outside discourse, outside the symbolic where Lacan places the metononymic. In this way, the two can be seen as together yet separate; both the girl and the mother can be separate beings, while remaining in relationship. The woman does not have

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[1] Diana Fuss,'Essentially speaking: Luce Irigaray's language of essence',*Hypatia 3*, 3 (1989),62-80.

[2] Rosi Braidotti, 'Féminisme et philosophie: La philosophie contemporaine comme critique du pouvoir par rapport à la pensée féministe',(dissertation non publiée, Université de Paris 1,1981).

Both quotes are taken from Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray, Philosophy in the feminine*, (London:Routledge,1991)p.172.

[3] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists* (Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),pp.116-117.

to oust her mother in order to be.[4]

She also sees 'the two lips' as a metaphor for "a female homosexual economy": "So the 'two lips' or contiguity is the condition both of sexual difference (and thus of the sexual relation) and of a female homosexual economy."[5]

Two important points are made in these quotations: the first one is the emphasis on a relationship between women which is a relationship between two subjects, therefore, between subjects in their own right. Mother and daughter are two subjects who are linked by a relation of necessity, that of a filial bond, but more crucially by the fact that they are both women and therefore doomed to remain outside the male symbolic order as dictated by the Law of the Father. However, in Irigaray's discourse, mother and daughter cannot be interchangeable because they are submitted to the same destiny. They can be seen as close, perhaps similar, but not merged in the same subjective category; they cannot be substituted for one another; "they touch, or associate, or combine", but they remain inherently separate.[6] This seems to be why Whitford uses the term metonymy instead of metaphor used by other

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[4] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray, Philosophy in the feminine*,(London:Routledge,1991)p.182.

[5] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray, Philosophy in the feminine*,(London:Routledge,1991)p.182.

[6] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray, Philosophy in the feminine*,(London:Routledge,1991)p.180.

critics. Her intention is to stress the importance Irigaray attaches to the closeness and yet the independence of mother and daughter as expressed in 'the two lips'. In this way, mother and daughter are placed as subjects in the female genealogy, hence Whitford's remark: "women are no longer outside the symbolic". The child's entry into language and therefore into the symbolic is no longer conditioned by his/her renouncing the mother in order to have access to meaning guaranteed by the symbolic father as mediator of social order. Instead of being displaced, in the Freudian sense of the word, the mother is linked to the daughter by a relation of contiguity. In other words, the daughter can identify with the mother without having to sacrifice her to the Father's Law. She can situate herself in relation to her mother as a subject because she is an active part of the female genealogy.[7]

More to the point, as regards my argument, when women are in a position of contiguity they can experience a relationship as well as their sexuality as two autonomous subjects who are equally responsible and active. This means that they can be the desiring subject or the desired object in sexual relations. Consequently, there is no need for them to refer to the phallic economy to exist and act. Sexuality between female subjects can be contained and

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[7] For a more detailed analysis of female genealogy, see chapter Two.

validated within a female order. The contiguity offered by 'the two lips' acts as a passport to multiplicity, excess and agency in female sexuality.

> Contiguity... stands for women's sociality, love of self on the woman's side, the basis for a different form of social organization and a different economy.[8]

As an extension of Whitford's reading, I will argue that 'the two lips' could be interpreted as a space in the symbolic within which lesbian sexuality has its place.

Before engaging in this discussion, it is necessary to return very briefly to the traditional psychoanalytic analysis of sexuality to understand Irigaray's argument. According to Freud and Lacan, sexuality cannot be understood or function outside the phallic. Although Freud seems to acknowledge the fact the the pre-oedipal stage could be a period where the predominance of the phallic order may be justifiably questioned if not denied, no real importance is given to this possibility. What matters for him is the resolution of the oedipal complex which has to determine the child's acceptance of sexual difference and therefore of his male or her female identity. This stage marks his/her acknowledgment of social norms and has to lead to heterosexuality to be satisfactory:

> First, there is the total ignorance and suppression of the mother, who is accused either of promoting

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[8] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray, Philosophy in the feminine*, (London:Routledge,1991)pp.180-181.

> incestuous desire or encouraging regression. Secondly, there is the acceptance of the father's rights over the mother, and the erection of patriarchal law as a universal and normative principle that determines psycho-sexual development. Finally, the phallogocentric government of all psycho-sexual relationships excludes anything specifically feminine: the Phallus and castration, for example, determine not only the constitution of sexual difference, but 'knowledge' of it, and its supposed heterosexual 'resolution'.[9]

For Lacan, sexual division is established by the subjects's recognition of the other and of Symbolic Order: "It is important to note ... that the law pre-determines emergence of the infant's desire [...]".[10] This view is also endorsed by Grosz:

> Whether male or female, the subject is produced as masculine and/or feminine through submission to the phallic norm. This is an effect of language's capacity to inscribe the bodies of males and females with specific values and meanings... The phallus marks male and female bodies in sexually specific ways.[11]

In this system of sexual identities, roles are fixed by a hierarchy. Women are justified as passive as their role is to receive the penis. As such they are passive objects of male desire. Besides, female desire is

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[9] Martin Stanton, 'Oedipus Complex', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*,ed. by Elizabeth Wright,(Oxford:Blackwell,1992),pp.290-296(p.291).

[10] Martin Stanton, 'Oedipus Complex', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*,ed. by Elizabeth Wright,(Oxford:Blackwell,1992),pp.290-296(p.293).

[11] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists*(Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),pp.24-25.

characterized by the lack, that is to say, in Lacanian terms, the lack of the phallus: "She,[woman], becomes the phallus, the object of his desire, by becoming desirable for him, confirming that he has what she lacks (and thus wants)".[12]

The function allocated to the drives, be it by Freud or Lacan, also reinforces the sexual division of sexual roles for men and women. Although Freud admits that the object of desire is not a pre-established object and, despite the fact that human sexuality is not automatically constructed as heterosexuality, the active/passive duality of the drives still place women in a position of submission to men:

> Freud states that the girl's evolution towards feminity takes place through passage from active to passive, from the mother to the father, and terminates in the establishment of the 'feminine situation' in the mutation of penis envy into baby wish, the baby being the symbolic equivalent of the penis (1937,1925).[13]

The insistence on passivity and the predominant need for the phallus is reiterated in Freud's theory of sadomasochism:

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[12] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists*(Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p.21.

[13] Danielle Bergeron, 'Femininity', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*,ed. by Elizabeth Wright,(Oxford:Blackwell,1992),pp.92-98(p.96). The dates in brackets refer to Sigmund Freud's following work: 'Analysis terminable and interminable', in *Standard Ed.*,23, (1937),pp. 209-254, and 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes', in *Standard Ed.*,19, (1925) pp.241-260.

> [...] the term "sadomasochism" has also come to describe inter-subjective relations in which one person, often female, plays a predominantly 'passive' role, the other, often male, a predominantly 'active one'. Freud repeatedly suggests that the masochistic or passive is 'feminine' and the sadistic or active is 'masculine'.[14]

It is also important to note that for Freud, masochism is related to the death drive, a part of which is guilt. This guilt could be interpreted in many ways; the non-acceptance of the phallic norms by women or the overwhelming power exerted by the phallic economy which may generate rejection. The impossible desire to return to the perfect dyad created by the phallic mother and the child is another possibility of justifying the position of women as passive and masochistic.[15]

Grosz defines the role of the drives in Lacanian discourse as follows:

> Sexual drives are marked by the lack (of a fixed object). Sexuality is pleasure that is dominated by the lack... sexuality is split into pre-oedipal (imaginary) and oedipal (symbolic) forms:
> - in its pre-oedipal forms, sexual drives are chaotic, anarchic, and circulate throughout the child's body, in many regions that, from the adult point of view, have little to do with copulative sexuality; in its oedipalized forms, sexual drives become hierarchichal under the primacy of the genitals and the aims of heterosexual genital reproductive sexuality[...]
> - the constitution of the subject as a sexual and desiring being at the same time produces subjects as

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[14] Karen M. Cope, 'Sadomasochism', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*,ed. by Elizabeth Wright,(Oxford:Blackwell,1992),pp.385-390(p.387).

[15] The question of passivity and masochism will discussed in more detail in the passage on lesbian masochism.

> sexually differentiated, i.e., as active and therefore masculine or passive and thus feminine[...][16]

For Freud as for Lacan, the main elements structuring the drives revolve around the symbolic power of the phallus representing the sexually active male subject, and logically, as a counterpart, around the 'lack', which is materialized by the desire to either return to the phallic mother or to be the phallus for the male partner. In all cases, female passivity can be interpreted, on one hand, in terms of being or wanting the phallus or its substitution, that is to say a child, or, on the other hand, of acting as the submissive recipient for the penis in order to respond to reproductive requirements imposed by the patriarchal order. In Lacan's discourse as in Freud's, sexual identity can only be constructed satisfactorily if sexual difference is marked by the acknowledgement of a hierarchy between the sexes. In this context, passivity and activity could even be regarded as complementary instead of being considered as antagonistic divisions designed to justify the imposition of social and cultural norms. Thus, following Lacan's reasoning, the position of men as subjects could seem to be warranted by their phallic superiority, the Phallus being the signifier around which subject/object relations revolve. For Freud, although the clitoris and the penis are considered as

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[16] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990)pp.80-81.

morphologically equal during the genital phase, they are described in terms of activity and passivity when it comes to overcoming the stage of awareness in order to gain real pleasure; activity and passivity function as metaphors for masculinity and femininity:

> Freud subordinates the component sexual drives to their reproductive end. But this is a two step process: the first aim of the genital phase is autoerotic satisfaction. Until this point, the penis and the clitoris are given a morphological equality (the clitoris is called a little penis); indeed, children are said to come into an undifferentiated awareness of their erotogenic zones and the achievement of pleasure through them. These zones are marked not by masculine or feminine terms, but by an active or passive relation taken towards the process of obtaining their satisfaction.[17]

For both psychoanalysts, women who fail to answer the rules defined by the Symbolic Order fall into the category of perversion. I would argue that, in this context, these women, such as lesbians, could be said to become active sexual subjects by default. That is to say, their active roles as sexual subjects could only be justified by the fact that they do not satisfy the norms determining female sexual roles. This is precisely what Irigaray wants to denounce when she claims that women's sexuality can be expressed in various ways, '*le multiple*'. I would suggest that the role of contiguity is to work as a space where '*le multiple*' can be materialized.

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[17] Debra Keates, 'Sexual Difference', in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*,ed. by Elizabeth Wright,(Oxford:Blackwell,1992),pp.402-405(p.404).

2. CONTIGUITY: A SPACE FOR FEMALE SEXUAL SUBJECTS

In Lacan's theory, contiguity is the space facilitating the link between two terms so that displacement or metonymy can take place. Lacan specifies that when one element, for example, element 'a' can be associated with another element, element 'b', the element 'a' can represent the element 'b' without suppressing it; likewise for two meanings, where one meaning can represent another without repressing it in the unconscious:

> Metonymy or displacement ensures, by contrast, that the repressed term always remains in associative relations to the rest of the subject's language, explaining how the unconscious is able to intervene into or speak through consciousness at symptomatic moments.[18]

Grosz also defines the relation between metonymy, displacement and contiguity as follows: "Displacement is a metonymy, a relation between two terms, both of which remain present but which are related by means of contiguity.[19] As pointed out by Whitford, Irigaray's interpretation of the Lacanian use of contiguity is a loose application of its model. What Irigaray intends to do is to form a chain of associations emphasizing the multiplicity of possibilities the female subject can use to construct a model of identity in the symbolic and

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[18] Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London:Routledge,1990)p.100.

[19] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists*(Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p.24.

consequently a new social order.

> Irigaray emphasizes the *context*, the possibility of limitless combination, a new syntax of culture which is creative and open-ended. ... the metonymic allows for process.[20]

I will argue that the particular aspects of contiguity referred to, in this discussion, could be said to play a determining role in the construction of lesbian subjectivity. The principle of contiguity will be articulated around the idea of independence and fusion, presented as two inseparable components of the association between two female subjects. Female sexuality, in this context, is also expressed in terms of multiplicity.

In *Quand nos lévres se touchent*, 'the two lips' can be understood as a symbolic model of fusion betwen two women. The text does not actually specify that 'the two lips' represent two women, nor can the interpretation of 'the two lips' be restricted to lesbian sexuality. Nonetheless, following my previous postulate, as well other feminist analyses acknowledging the validity of this insight, in this debate, I will refer to the 'I' and the 'You' of the Irigarian text as if they represent two female protagonists.[21]

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[20] Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray, Philosophy in the feminine*, (London:Routledge,1991)pp.179-180.

[21] See note 5, p. 258.

The important point about fusion is to stress that, for Irigaray, fusion does not mean assimilation or absorption of one subject by the other. Irigaray does not mean that the two women are linked by a subject/object relation governed by the inevitable active/passive dualism Freud and Lacan associate to heterosexuality. In the Irigarian model, the subject cannot be subsumed by his/her partner. Moreover, the idea of merger cannot be understood as an ideal where both partners end up forming one and only one person as is the case in the Catholic version of love.

The Irigarian relation is a subject to subject relation where A and B are together but equal and absolutely distinct. That is to say, they are not immobilized in a hierarchy of domination and submission. One does not have to give in order to receive; both can interchange and reciprocate on an equal basis; more importantly, they can do so outside the system of exchange run by the male economy:

> Car je t'aime est sans don, ni dette... Tu te/me gardes autant que tu te/me confies... Entre nous, pas de propriétaires ni d'acquéreurs, pas d'objets déterminables, pas de prix.[22]

This exchange is possible because the relation between two women does not rely on the anticipation that one of the protagonists will have to fill a gap, in the Lacanian sense, and therefore be posited as the only dominant

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[22] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977)pp.206-213.

subject. "Les manques, les béances, qui attendraient de l'autre subsistance, plénitude, complétude, ce n'est pas nous".[23] As a result, there is no fixed order where one would have to be or to have the Signifier, that is to say the Phallus, to represent the meaning of desire and be capable of satisfying the other's desire. Both women are designated as subjects in their own right; they are not replicas of the male model and they do not have to obey the practices imposed as norms by that model:

> T'assimilant modèle après modèle, passant de maître en maître, changeant de figure, de forme, de langage, selon ce qui te domine...Le sexe de ton/mon corps ne nous est pas donné par une opération. Par l'action d'un pouvoir, d'une fonction, d'un organe.[24]

Irigaray can situate the two women as two active agents because not only are they equal but they are also able to avoid the trap of power relations characterizing heterosexuality by being similar but distinguishable, perfectly united and yet independent: "Tu/je: font toujours plusieurs à la fois...Nous sentons les mêmes choses en même temps... Alors que nous sommes toujours l'une et l'autre en même temps".[25] This fusion between the two women can only work because between them, there is a space, a space marking their self-respect and the

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[23] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977)p.209.

[24] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977)p.210.

[25] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977)pp.209-216.

acknowledgment of their reciprocal autonomy. That space is all the more important as it is denied to women by patriarchal order according to which they belong to the same category. In this category, as shown in chapter one, women are not recognized as subjects and they are too similar to be differentiated. Hence, contiguity acts as a space in which proximity, closeness but also autonomy enables women to establish their own identity as distinctive and active. I would argue that the space of contiguity thus created can be seen as a symbolic mark of female genealogy.[26]

What matters to the philosopher is to create a space where female subjectivity and female sexuality can be independent, in order to develop and to materialize female specificity. Irigaray does not attempt to reverse the male order:

> Mais, si leur projet visait simplement à renverser l'ordre des choses - admettons même que cela soit possible...- l'histoire reviendrait finalement encore au même. Au phallocratisme. Ni leur sexe, ni leur imaginaire, ni leur language n'y (re)trouverait leur avoir lieu.[27]

Instead she wishes to explore various interpretations and possibilities of constructing a space where women can rediscover their potential and express it by claiming

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[26] See chapter Two for the analysis of the Irigarian theory of female genealogy.

[27] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.3.

agency in the symbolic and in society. By reclaiming a space which has been assimilated to a void, a lack or a flaw, '*un défaut*', Irigaray wants to show that the '*indifférence*' characterizing women in the Lacanian discourse is in fact a mark of difference and not inferiority.

The notion of closeness characterizing contiguity can be seen as a part of this difference. According to Irigaray, the closeness and mutual trust women can share is not conceivable between men and women as long as they live in a patriarchal system. She partly explains this impossibility by the fact that the closeness to their own body women can experience is denied to men, at least, it seems to me, heterosexual men, although this category does not figure in her argument.[28]

This closeness is not women's prerogative just because they are female. Men could also experience this closeness

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[28] This is an assumption I make as it has been shown that gay men have a different perception of their body from that of heterosexual men, not by nature but rather by choice. They choose not to conform to the so-called sexual norms imposed by the dominant sexual order. This view is confirmed by J. Weeks in a passage entitled: 'Refusing to refuse the body', where he explains that we should have the right to control our bodies and to reclaim "our bodies as our own". According to him, this is what gay politics has been fighting for. Weeks also refers to R. Dyer who "sees in the sub-cultures of the gay world a new 'body culture,' expressed in styles, physical expressiveness and body awareness, that 'refuses to refuse the body any more'". Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meaning, Myths & Modern Sexualities* (London:Routledge,1985)pp.242-245.

to their own body if they were allowed to do so. In traditional psychoanalytic theory , the male body is constructed as virile and phallic, that is to say, as representing symbolic and social authority and power guaranteed by the Law of the Father. Internalized socio-cultural codes and practices reinforce these characteristics which prevent men from associating their corporeality with their lives. "La vérité est nécessaire à ceux qui se sont tant éloignés de leur corps qu'ils l'ont oublié".[29] As indicated by Grosz, Irigaray understands male sexuality as follows:

> There is ... a parallelism, an isomorphism between patriarchal power relations, the structure of dominant or socially recognised discourses, and the socially produced phallic male body... It is not the anatomy of the male body which seeks its own image in dominant discourse. Rather, the pre-existence of patriarchal social relations relies on the production of a specific form of male sexuality through internalisation of images, representations and signifying practices. In other words, men do not form discourse in their own image(s); rather, phallocentric discourses form male sexuality in their image(s).[30]

Another element has to be taken into account to explain men's separation from their body. As already mentioned in the first two chapters, Irigaray considers that, what she calls, the 'debt to the mother' has to be accepted by men and women in order to be able to live harmoniously with

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[29] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977)p.213.

[30] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists*(Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p.112.

one's body. For Irigaray, motherhood must be separate from womanhood. Motherhood can be one element in a woman's life but not its determining factor. But on the other hand, she also considers that children, be they boys or girls, are indebted to their mother, not so much because the mother has given them birth, but because she is also the guarantor of an order, the maternal order, which the child must abandon when he/she enters language. As Grosz explains: "Unable to give the child language, law and exchange - the phallus - she has only nurturance, and its most tangible manifestations".[31] Despite the fact the girl has a mother with whom she can and is asked to identify, she still cannot identify with a woman, as women have no genealogy of their own.[32]

The boy, on the other hand, must reject the mother in order to enter the Law of the Father. Consequently men cannot acknowledge their corporeality by expressing the importance of their body as a lived body, that is to say, as a determining part of their emotional, psychical and social life. In Irigarian terms, it would seem correct to say that the intimacy with their body most women can experience is refused to most heterosexual men.

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[31] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists*(Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p.121.

[32] Refer back to chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on the female subject, language and female genealogy.

For Irigaray, it is important for two women to have the possibility of sharing, at least symbolically, the closeness to their own body in order to develop a space of contiguity where female sexuality can exist in its own right. In that space, unity and recognition of differences in sameness may help to facilitate fusion and creation in terms of sexual relations.

As demonstrated, closeness is a form of enrichment and not a return to essentialism; it is a way of entering a relation of fusion resulting in merger. Nevertheless, in this type of merger, identities are not erased. I would interpret the space Irigaray proposes to reconstruct as a creative opening onto pleasure and a way of existing and acting differently from what is expected from women by patriarchal discourse. The future Irigaray outlines for women recreates female sexuality by taking it away from the male economy of erasure and domination in which heterosexuality has been structured:

> Où suis-je devenue?...M'a-t-il mangée? Rejetée? Prise? Laissée? Enfermée? Expulsée? ... Quand il me dit: *Je t'aime?* me rend-il? Ou est-ce lui qui se donne sous cette forme? La sienne? La mienne? La même? Une autre? Mais alors où suis-je devenue?[33]

Compared with this mode of exchange between men and women, Irigaray opposes the following model of relation between two women:

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[33] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.206.

> Car je t'aime est sans don, ni dette... Tu ne me "donnes" rien en te touchant, en me touchant: te retouchant à travers moi. Tu ne me donnes pas. Que ferais-je de toi, de moi, ainsi repliées sur un don... Ces alternatives... ces marchés n'ont pas lieu entre nous. Sauf à répéter leur commerce,... Où nous n'as pas lieu.[34]

With the expression 'Où suis-je devenue', Irigaray questions the way women have been constructed as subjects in the symbolic. She also stresses the fact that women have been confined to a role, in the male sexual economy, which is entirely determined by men's desire and understanding of pleasure, mainly revolving around power relations; women give and men expect and rule. No real fusion can take place as the female object of desire is either displaced or subsumed by the male sexual subject. In this economy, there does not seem to be any possibility of enabling women to assert their own sexual identity. According to the philosopher, men have traded women's desire for their own pursuit of power. Men's power can be seen, here, either as pleasure, mainly sexual, or as the wish or need to reproduce. "Mon sang est devenu leur sens".[35] Hence the need to disrupt this sexual order:

> Si tu bouges, tu déranges leur ordre. Tu fais tout basculer. Tu romps le cercle de leurs habitudes, la circularité de leurs échanges, de leur savoir, de leur désir.[36]

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[34] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.206.

[35] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.207.

[36] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.207.

The interesting point in this quotation is Irigaray's emphasis on the 'circularity' of male desire and sexuality. The words '*cercles*', '*habitudes*' and '*circularité*' insist on the fact the male desire cannot open onto a different understanding of sexuality, whether this sexuality is male or female. Men and women are therefore both trapped in the norms imposed by 'hom(m)osexuality', that is to say, in "a world of the masculine subject, that can think itself only between masculine subjects".[37]

I would suggest that 'hom(m)osexual' economy gives men the opportunity of retreating into the certainty of the roles the sexual dominant order has given them. As legitimate subjects, they are supposed to represent the truth and reality of their nature. The awareness of their dominance is legitimized by social and cultural constructs and practices. They are able to affirm their self-confidence as well as their power over women for two reasons: first, the imperialism of their desire is justified by the psychoanalytic, medical or scientific discourse, and secondly, their self-confidence is gradually built up by what has become norms or cultural habits. The knowledge and certainty of possessing and controlling the truth gives them the opportunity of exchanging models of

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[37] The definition of 'hom(m)osexuality' here is given by Irigaray during an interview with Elizabeth Hirsh and Gary Olson in 1994. Elizabeth Hirsh & Gary Olson,'Je-Luce Irigaray:A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', *Hypathia*,10 (1994),93-114(p.112).

sexual objects and practices. In Bourdieusian terms, this would be a typical example of symbolic violence. Modes of perception and understanding of heterosexuality are unconsciously received; the 'circularity' of male desire Irigaray talks about is one illustration of the sexual *habitus*; in other words, men's disposition to organise their sexuality, mostly to the detriment of women's sexual autonomy, is shaped by the prevalent sexual order. This disposition also structures their sexual practices. The resulting knowledge and practices shape behaviours which gradually become norms and values guaranteed by the dominant discourse of sexuality. The structuring of heterosexual identity and practices is organized around the paradigm of male sexuality which ends up functioning as heterosexism.[38] This process, however, is not always recognized as a form of imposition although its mechanisms are known. Thus, the organisation of sexual identities and roles can be interpreted as an act of symbolic violence.

Irigaray's way to reclaim female sexuality is to make women aware of their potential which can be expressed as multiplicity and fluidity:

> Tu sais bien que ne nous sommes jamais finies...L'horizon pour nous, n'aura jamais fini de se cerner, toujours ouvertes... Nous n'aurons jamais

[38] Heterosexism is used here to express the idea that heterosexual sex organized according to the phallocentric economy is the only legitimate and acceptable form of sex.

> accompli notre parcours, notre pourtour: nous avons tant de dimensions.[39]

Once the aptitude for multiplicity is recognized, a new meaning can be created:

> Si nous n'inventons pas un langage, si nous ne trouvons pas son langage, notre corps aura trop peu de gestes pour accompagner notre histoire. Nous nous fatiguerons des mêmes, laissant notre désir en latence, en souffrance...insatisfaites. Et rendues aux mots des hommes.[40]

In the space Irigaray proposes to build, oppositions such as active subject versus passive object cannot exist. She associates multiplicity with fusion: "[...] tu me touches toute en même temps. Dans tous les sens".[41] New meanings are also created:

> Ne pas nous laisser, encore, env(i)oler dans leur langage...Inventons vite nos phrases... rien ne pourra s'opposer à ce que nous nous rejoignons... si nous trouvons des moyens de transmission qui aient *notre* densité.[42]

In 'Quand nos lèvres se parlent', I have interpreted 'the two lips', as a way of defining a space of contiguity where two women can reclaim their sexuality. As sexual subjects they can posit themselves and act as independent and active subjects precisely because they are outside the

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[39] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),pp.211-212.

[40] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.212.

[41] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un*,(Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.214.

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phallic economy of desire. For two women, fusion with another female partner facilitates closeness to their own body and their self which they learn to like and value again. The role of multiplicity is to break habits and conditioning thus enabling women to discover the boundless potential of their sexuality. All these developments can become possible if a space of freedom, respect and autonomy is an inherent part of the economy of contiguity. In order to illustrate this postulate, I will now attempt to demonstrate that my interpretation of contiguity can be applied specifically to one category of women, lesbians, by looking at lesbian subjectivity, sexuality and agency.

3. CONTIGUITY: A SPACE FOR AUTONOMY AND FLUIDITY IN LESBIAN SEXUAL IDENTITY.

Can a space defined in terms of contiguity be used to understand how lesbian sexual identity is produced? To answer this question I will examine the traditional psychoanalytic definition of lesbian sexuality. Secondly, the role of contiguity in relation to fluidity will be presented as a way of displacing and transgressing the dominant sexual order.

3.1. The female homosexual in traditional psychoanalysis.

To understand how lesbian sexuality has been constructed, a reference to psychoanalytic discourse is unavoidable. For Freud or Lacan, female homosexuality has been analysed as a perversion. Therefore, lesbian subjectivity, which is partly constructed on the basis of lesbian sexuality, cannot be a form of sexuality in its own right. In traditional psychoanalytic discourse, what is classified as normal development of sexuality must revolve around the phallus as the main pole of pleasure and identification:

> [...] in the oedipal phase the female child must renounce clitoral stimulation in favour of vaginal penetration - [which] secures phallic privilege by imposing a cultural solution on what he [Freud] deemed as a biological "problem". Such psychosexual adaptation is enabled by Freud's equation between the clitoris and the penis, an equivalence that simultaneously is physiological (the clitoris and penis are analogous in structure and function),

> psychological (both indicate an active masculine aim), and metaphorical (during the infantile "phallic" stage, "the little girl is a little man".[43]

Traub also explains that because the little girl has not been able to replace the mother by the father, as an object of desire, the clitoris is thus a locus of pleasure and therefore linked to lesbianism. Thus, the clitoris is not recognized as a proper site of pleasure; only vaginal orgasm within heterosexual sex can be considered as adequate and real pleasure.

For Freud, female homosexuality is not described in relation to femininity but in terms of male heterosexuality or male homosexuality. Same sex desire is either a form of inversion, that is to say, an internalized psychical and physical identification with masculinity, or a perversion. It is interesting to note that perversion, in psychoanalysis, only applies to sexuality. Its classic definition is given by Laplanche and Pontalis: "Déviation par rapport à l'acte sexuel "normal", défini comme coït visant à obtenir l'orgasme par pénétration génitale, avec une personne du sexe opposé".[44] What is not specified in this definition, is that the idea of reproduction inherent in vaginal penetration, is paramount in Freud's approach.

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[43] Valerie Traub, 'The Psychomorphology of the clitoris', *G.L.Q.*,2 (1995),81-113 (p.81).

[44] Jean Lapalanche & J.B. Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* (Paris:Presses Universitaires de France,1967),p.306.

Female homosexuality as perversion can also be explained in relation to narcissistic and anaclitic types related to object-choice theory. They can be defined as follows:

> An anaclitic choice is made on the basis of a real or imagined resemblance of the object to an early object of need (a 're-finding', for example, of the mother or father); a narcissistic choice is based on a (mis)recognition in the other of what the subject imagines itself to be, or wishes to become.[45]

The anaclitic object-choice is seen as active and therefore masculine, "Complete object-love of the attachment type is, properly speaking, characteristic of the male".[46] This means that, in Freud's account of sexuality, men's role is to take women as their love object. Narcissistic object-choice, on the other hand, is considered to be passive, and as such, characterizes women: "[...] feminine narcissism is "unfavourable to the development of a true object-choice".[47]

Once again, the dualism object/subject, active/passive,

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[45] Victor Burgin, in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis:A Critical Dictionary*,ed. by Elizabeth Wright, (Oxford:Blackwell,1992), pp.277-280(p.279).

[46] Quote from Freud, *On Narcissism*, Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London: Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.55-67(p.82).

[47] Quote from Freud, *On Narcissism*, Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London: Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.55-67(p.82).

is confirmed by what is regarded as a scientific approach. But where does same sex object-choice fit into this? Storr explains that according to Freud, female homosexuality is trapped in the psychic and physiological organisation of feminity: "In this framework of desire... she both seeks her own likeness as object of desire... and simultaneously positions herself as that object of desire".[48]

For Lacan, woman also wishes to be the object of desire for the male subject:

> [...] in the primitive form of marriage, if a woman isn't given, or doesn't give herself, to a god, to something transcendent, the fundamental relation suffers every form of imaginary degradation.[49]

In the same quotation, it is interesting to note that by 'god', Lacan refers to the "universal man, who is both the most concrete and the most transcendent man". This confirms Irigaray's theory that women's existence is ruled by the omnipotent male subject. Storr agrees: "In other words, again, the woman who embraces a man thereby embraces the

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[48] Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.55-67(p.56).

[49] Quote from Lacan, *Seminar Book 2*,p.262, in Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London: Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.55-67(pp.59&57).

symbolic order, and positions herself as object of both".[50] Being a homosexual female, for Lacan, can only be understood by analysing her dependence to the phallus. On the one hand, like heterosexual women, female homosexuals have to be the phallus:

> [T]he man manages to satisfy his demand for love in his relationship to the woman to the extent that the signifier of the phallus constitutes her precisely as giving in love what she does not have. In that such a love prides itself more than any other on being the love which gives what it does not have, so it is precisely in this that the homosexual woman excels in relation to what is lacking to her.[51]

On the other hand, as explained by Storr, women may see themselves as having the phallus if they identify with the male subject; their homosexuality is either determined by penis envy or by 'phallus envy' as they cannot be recognized as subjects of desire in the symbolic.[52] Either way, narcissistic object-choice is governed by the

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[50] Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.55-67(p.59).

[51] Lacan, 'The meaning of the Phallus', & 'Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Feminine Sexuality', trans. by Jacqueline Rose, in Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds. *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd,1982)pp.74-85, quoted in Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*,ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.60-67(pp.60 & 67).

[52] Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*,ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.60-67(p.64).

power of the Phallus and female homosexual desire is articulated in terms of being either too feminine or attempting to masquerade as the masculine subject. Even when Freud suggests that a form of anaclitic attachment to an object of love can take place in female homosexuality, this particularity is still judged to be an abnormality because it does not fit in with the roles and identities imposed by the heterosexual economy of desire. "[...]anaclysis is always masculine, even though Freud in his later paper now believes that it is the primary form of object-love for both boys and girls".[53]

In fact, the term lesbianism does not exist in traditional psychoanalytic discourse. It has no value of its own, lesbians have no specific identity; the expression female homosexual is used instead. It would therefore appear that no identity, unless it is synonymous with or related to perversion, can be legitimized in its own right outside heterosexual economy.

Freud's and Lacan's theories have obviously inspired medical discourse as well as pyschologists and sexologists and therefore permeated the public's understanding of female homosexuality. It seems to be a common belief that

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[53] Merl Storr, 'Psychoanalysis and Lesbian Desire: The Trouble with Female Homosexuals',in *Activating theory: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Politics*,ed. by Joseph Bristow and Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.60-67(p.65).

lesbianism is a pathology; lesbians are either the victims of incestuous relations or they define themselves in relation to their father. They either reject him as a love object or they identify with him. As far as sexual identities and practices are concerned, this means that a lesbian has to be a woman desirable both for a man and a woman; or it implies that a lesbian must behave as a male sexual subject would to express her desire, that is to say, as a male active dominant subject desiring a passive, submissive object, her female partner. Either way, it is a question of being or having the phallic power of the man: "As Freud sums up the perverse trajectory of disappointed womanhood, 'She changed into a man and took her mother in place of her father as the object of her love'".[54]

Traub considers Irigaray's theory of 'the two lips', and more particularly, the notion of multiplicity, to be a way of thinking "beyond the pathologies inscribed by Freud" in the definition and function of sexuality.[55] Traub refers to 'the two lips' in the following way: "a female merger ...negating the difference between one and two (bodies, erotic practices)". She also makes this

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[54] Mary Jacobus, 'Russian Tactics, Freud's "Case of Homosexuality in a Woman"', in *GLQ*, 2,(1995),pp.??-??(p.65).

[55] Valerie Traub, 'The Psychomorphology of the clitoris' *GLQ*,2 (1995),81-113(p.100).

statement: "Irigaray collapses the labia, the female voice and 'lesbian(s)' into a unified expression of boundless feminine desire".[56] In my opinion, this is not what Irigaray sets out to do. As demonstrated in my interpretation of the idea of contiguity, the idea of independence is indispensable to the construction of a space in which two women can act as subjects. The function of this space is to emphasize the role of 'the two lips' as a symbol of respect and difference experienced by two female lovers within a relationship marked by fusion.

The notion of space between lovers, whether they are two female lovers or male and female lovers, is essential to Irigaray. The philosopher does specify the importance of this idea of space in *J'Aime à Toi*. The '*à*' of the expression '*J'Aime à Toi*', stresses the need not to merge the two subjects in one, that is to say, to avoid giving them the same intentionality, or to reduce them to only one subject which would still be the male subject.[57] Irigaray explains that the '*à*' marks the distance indicating that the two lovers are not and cannot treat each other as objects; they do not belong to each other and have to respect the other as an independent subject although they still experience unity.

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[56] Valerie Traub, 'The Psychomorphology of the clitoris' *GLQ.*,2 (1995),81-113(p.102).

[57] Refer to the last part of the second chapter for a more detailed discussion on *J'Aime à Toi*.

> Je ne te soumets ni te consomme. Je te respecte (comme irréductible)... Le "à" est le garant de l'indirection...Le "à" est le lieu de non-réduction à l'objet... Le "à" est aussi une barrière contre l'aliénation de la liberté de l'autre dans ma subjectivité, mon monde, ma parole [...].[58]

Following this declaration, I would argue that the space provided by the notion of contiguity is crucial as it offers the possibility of going beyond the traditional psychoanalytic discourse on female sexuality. More importantly, perhaps, it also offers the possibility of constructing new models of subjectivity which can depend on the active and creative roles of sexual subjects, regardless of their sex and gender. By creative, I mean that sexuality does not have to revolve around the phallic organisation of desire. Other areas of the body can be recognized as legitimate erotogenous zones, although they are not determined by the phallic economy of desire and pleasure.

3.2. Fluidity, lesbian identity and agency.

Irigaray's notion of fluidity will be used to show that the prevalent model of sexuality can be displaced. Firstly, the philosopher's opposition between what she

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[58] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi: Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992),pp.171-172. The need to respect the autonomy of the subjects, including when the subjects are involved in a relationship, whether it is physical or other, has been made clear by Irigaray during a series of lectures given at the Institut International de Philosophie, in Paris, in 1992.

calls 'the fluid' and 'the solid' will be discussed in the context of her overall theory of fluidity. Secondly, fluidity will be used to re-examine the role of lesbian sexual subjects. I will argue that sexual subjects can choose to be either subjects or objects of desire.

3.2.1. Fluidity and 'the solid'.

> Or, *la femme a des sexes un peu partout.* Elle jouit d'un peu partout... la géographie de son plaisir est bien plus diversifiée, multiple dans ses différences, complexe, subtile, qu'on ne l'imagine... dans un imaginaire un peu trop centré sur le même.[59]

Irigaray claims that male subjectivity has been constructed according to a logic of 'the solid' demanding the male subject's symbolic separation from the mother, nature and his body in order to fit into social and cultural structures imposed by phallogocentrism. 'The solid' is a sign of rationality, certainty and stability, all characteristics associated with the male subject. Conversely, fluidity, as a mark of fluctuation and instability is linked to femininity and has no place in the system of meanings guaranteed by the logos.

> [...] à partir d'un *subjectum* indifférencié, il [l'homme] s'érige comme entité *solide*...La logique occidentale en appellera à et s'appuiera sur une mécanique des solides. Le fluide toujours débordera la raison, la *ratio*, outrera la mesure... Mais l'opération des fluides ne s'énonce pas comme

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[59] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.28.

condition de vérité, de cohérence du *logos*".[60]

The same rules apply to the definition of sexuality. Heterosexuality dominated by the phallic economy establishes norms posited as the only representation of truth. 'The solid', in the context of male dominated sexuality, is interpreted as a immutable organisation of desire; it materializes the physical logic of thermodynamics typifying male sexual pleasure, that is to say, the process of "tension, discharge, and return to homeostasis":[61]

> Ainsi, quand la psychanalyse étaye sa théorie des mécanismes de l'inconscient sur la thermodynamique, elle recontraint la dynamique libidinale à fonctionner en circuit fermé, emprisonnant les flux pulsionnels dans des réservoirs *solides*... Ce qu'elle [la science du sujet] a établi comme vérité normative, elle refuse de l'interroger dans sa causalité mono-sexuée.[62]

On the other hand, the oppositions between 'nature/reason', 'subject/object', 'inertia/movement', contained in the dualism 'solid/fluid', can be overcome if fluidity is considered to work as a dynamic process of change which has two main functions. First, the displacement of the only sexual referent on which the very foundation of truth

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[60] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.288-289. The terms in italics are in italics in Irigaray's text.

[61] Terms used by Luce Irigaray in *Le Temps de la Différence*, (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.38.

[62] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre*, (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),pp.290-291.

relies to set sexual norms and practices.

> Quel sujet, aujourd'hui, croit encore au discours qu'il tient pour vrai, unique et définitif? Au nom duquel Dieu ordonne-t-il encore sa Vérité? Pour les psychanalystes, la réponse est relativement claire: le Phallus.[63]

Secondly, fluidity as a factor of evolution would bring about changes facilitating a new understanding of sexuality based on a multiplicity of meanings and freedom of practices which have no place in the logic of 'the solid'.

> La sexualité serait donc liée à des lois physiques qui ne lui laissent pas de liberté, pas d'avenir, autre que répétitif, explosif, non évolutif.[64]

> [...] l'infini serait en acte, physiquement et réellement, dans la dynamique des flux...une puissance dont l'énergie ne peut jamais se refermer-renfermer en *un acte*[...].[65]

This evolutive process, in female sexuality is materialized by *Jouissance:* "[...] ce qui advient dans la jouissance de la femme l'excède. Débordement indéfini où bien des devenirs pourront s'inscrire."[66] To escape the boundaries of 'the solid', fluidity operates as a constant

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[63] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.291.

[64] Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la Différence* (Paris:Le Livre de Poche,1989),p.38.

[65] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985),p.290. The words in italics are in italics in the text.

[66] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum: De l'Autre Femme* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1974),p.284.

mobility and impossibility in confining female sexuality to fixed categories:

> Cette mobilité, sans cesse... Parle quand même. Entre nous, le "dur" ne s'impose pas. Nous connaissons assez les contours de nos corps pour aimer la fluidité. Notre densité se passe de tranchant, de rigidité.[67]

Because the fluidity of female sexuality does not have to function in relation to or against the fixity of the phallic economy, constant movements between various erotogenous zones can reorganize desire and pleasure. For instance, female pleasure can be achieved through tactile contact, 'le toucher', or 'la retouche', symbolised by the openness and contact of 'the two lips'. Tactile contact can thus be valued again, which means that the phallic and 'the solid' no longer have to dominate women's pleasure. "Les lèvres jamais ouvertes ou fermées sur une vérité...Tu me touches toute en même temps. Dans tous les sens".[68]

Irigaray's attempt to rearticulate female sexuality can be said to be relevant to lesbian sexuality in several ways: it enables getting away from 'the solid', fluidity revalorizes tactile contact. The 'multiple sexes': "La femme a des sexes un peu partout", can be represented by the breast, the clitoris or other erotogenic zones of the female body which do not have to be mediated by the

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[67] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.214.

[68] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),pp.208-216.

phallus. This view has been endorsed by several feminists such as Grosz in her study of the drive:

> The drive has no fixed objects, or a vast range of objects... Sexual drives are all localized in particular regions of the body - in the first instance, the orifices, but as Freud claims, any part of the body, including the entire surface of the skin, and any internal organs, even the brain itself, can become an erotogenic source. The extreme pliability and flexibility in the range, scope and form of sexual drives implies their openness to historical transformations. Human sexuality is not fixed, regulated by biology, directed towards (heterosexuality) copulation and reproduction, as is commonly assumed. Any part of the body can be eroticized and become the source of a sexual drive.[69]

If body surfaces were considered to be as central as the inner body, the focus of which is the phallus and penetration, sexuality would not have to be understood in terms of a unified body, trapped in pre-determined mechanisms of pleasure and meanings. The need to get away from a fixed notion of pleasure and desire has been expressed by many theorists. Jeffrey Weeks is one example:

> Once the norm itself was challenged, then the category of the perverse became redundant, and with them the whole elaborate edifice of 'sexuality' - the belief that the erotic is a unified domain, governed by its own laws, organised around a norm and its variations - begins to crumble. We are left with the body and its potentialities for pleasure.[70]

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[69] Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions:Three French Feminists* (Sydney:Allen & Unwin,1989),p.72.

[70] Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London:Routledge,1985),pp.244-245.

3.2.2. Fluidity, roles and lesbian sexual subjects:

Another way of rearticulating lesbian desire is to separate it from the heterosexual discourse of ownership:

> Le propre, la propriété sont, sans doute, assez étrangers au féminin. Du moins sexuellement. Mais non le proche. Le si proche que toute discrimination d'identité en devient impossible. Donc toute forme de propriété... Elle s'échange elle-même sans cesse avec l'autre sans identification possible de l'un(e) ou l'autre.[71]

Two female lovers can experience 'fusion' without entering the heterosexual economy opposing the possessor, the male active subject and the 'possessed', the female object of desire. The lesbian sexual female subject does not have to own and control in order to function as a sexual subject, nor does she have to be immobilized in fixed sexual practices.

My analysis of this particular aspect of fluidity is an extension of Irigaray's theory. I would argue that the idea of mobility included in fluidity can be used to rethink the understanding and definition of lesbian sexuality and thus lesbian subjectivity. "L'économie des flux oblige à réévaluer ce qui s'est déterminé comme sujet".[72]

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[71] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.30.

[72] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1985)p.289.

If one admits that sexuality can function outside the boundaries of the phallic economy, another space can be created, *'Un ailleurs de jouissance'*, in Irigarian terms.[73] One way of opening up this space is to free female sexuality from the limits to which it has been confined. In terms of lesbian sexuality it means that same sex, for two women, does not imply that the partners have to be either pseudo-men or female inversions of the male sexual subject. Contiguity can be said to operate as a possibility for lesbian sexual subjects to be close and autonomous; they can also be equally active and creative because they do not have to submit to a pre-established order of pleasure. "[...] the negative constructions of lesbianism as a fake or a bad copy can be occupied and reworked to call into question the claims of heterosexual priority".[74]

Making this assumption obviously presupposes that the lesbian sexual subject can actually be recognized as a subject. On one hand, this suggests that she has been able to break the symbiosis with the mother during the pre-oedipal stage; the lesbian sexual subject does not need to transfer her feeling of loss to another woman. On the

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[73] Luce Irigaray, *Ce Sexe qui n'est est pas Un* (Paris:Les Editions de Minuit,1977),p.74.

[74] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination", in *Inside/Out:Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (London:Routledge,1991),p.17.

other hand, it also means that the Oedipal complex has been resolved so that she is not driven to be the replica of the male subject.[75] Lesbian sexuality, when it is no longer bound to the psychoanalytic discourse of perversion, or to pathology in the medical counterpart, becomes a type of sexuality in its own right; the roles of subjects and objects can then be seen as different roles and not opposites.

Lesbians can be active sexual subjects as the multiplicity marking their desire is not conditioned by power relations. Penetration, when chosen, does not have to be a sign of oppression.[76] Lesbians do not have to enter roles and identities modelled on subject/object relation in order to consolidate their own subjectivity. This point of view is confirmed by Cherry Smyth who criticizes analyses of lesbianism based on the dominant sexual order. She wonders where the unavoidable penis is when 'there is no referent in sight', and hence no butch/femme roles demarcated by castration and phallic power:

> The problem with... these approaches is that they presuppose an erotic attraction between women that is dependent on a butch-femme dynamic. Desire between

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[75] My argument is situated in the context of Irigaray's critique of Freudian and Lacanian theories. Therefore, the mechanisms of the Oedipal complex cannot be avoided in this analysis. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the validity of the Oedipal complex cannot be generally taken for granted.

[76] See p.47 for a more detailed discussion on penetration.

> two women who do not reinvent these roles is more difficult to read under the psychoanalytic model. They also presuppose that butch-femme identifications are as fixed as heterosexual roles, while in reality, lesbians often change their sexual role when they change partners.[77]

If lesbians do choose to become or act as subjects or objects of desire, it is an option they select and not the result of an inevitable division inherent in sexual difference: "[...] wanting to be like the object or seeing oneself as the object(ego-libido) is very different from wanting to sexually have the object (object-libido)".[78] Smyth uses the expression 'ego-libido' to refer to the active subject who has the power to choose her role as sexual subject as well as her object of desire (object-libido); but desiring the 'object-libido' does not mean that the subject's desire is entirely organized around that object without which it could not exist. The object of desire, in lesbian sexuality, is another woman to whom the sexual subject may even decide to identify. But identification, in this context, is an active process of choice and an assertion of sexual agency; it expresses the wish to break with the cultural dominance of heterosex. The lesbian sexual subject keeps her identity by making

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[77] Cherry Smyth, 'The Transgressive Sexual Subject', in *A Queer Romance:Lesbian, Gay Men and Popular Culture,* ed. by Paul Burston and Paul Richardson(London:Routledge,1995),p.131.

[78] Cherry Smyth, 'The Transgressive Sexual Subject', in *A Queer Romance:Lesbian, Gay Men and Popular Culture,* ed. by Paul Burston and Paul Richardson(London:Routledge,1995),p.134.

this choice, unlike the heterosexual female subject. In psychoanalytic terms, her choice is anaclitic, which would mean that it is active and therefore classified as masculine. It is not an act of narcissism interpreted as the result of the misrecognition in the other of what the subject would like to be.[79] The fact that lesbian sexual subjects can decide to be the subject or object of desire, without any constraint, enables them to materialize the fluidity of their desire.

One crucial point must be raised at this stage of the debate. What is the role of penetration and sado-masochism in relation to lesbian sexuality? Can these two practices be considered to be outside the phallic economy, and if that is the case, to what degree do they express the choice of roles as subject and object for lesbians?

In the first instance, penetration can be seen as a non-oppressive practice if domination and appropriation are not part of the process:

> [...] acts which may be regarded as oppressive/harmful/unsatisfying to women in heterosexual relationships will in a different context (i.e. between two women) have different meaning... The experience, both psychologically and physically, of a man's penis in your vagina is not the same as...lesbians touching their lovers in their

[79] Refer to pp.30-31 for a more detailed discussion on object-choice.

vaginas.[80]

To support this point of view, I would also argue that vaginal penetration does not have to be automatically thought of in relation to penetration by the penis, or in terms of phallic symbolism. Penetration can just be seen as a practice carried out by two subjects who exchange means and ways of giving each other pleasure without having to enter domination/submission roles. Allocating masculine and feminine identities modelled on subject-object relations is not a determining framework for lesbian sexuality:

> [...] butch/femme may be a widely recognized set of conventions within lesbian culture, but it must not be assumed to be a constitutive or obligatory identification... butch/femme stages gender, manipulating its signs in a sexualized code that has everything to do with masculinity and femininity... In short, butch/femme reverses the supposedly obligatory derivation of sex from gender and breaks the chain that links masculine/feminine with its associated binaries: top/bottom, penetrator/penetrated, active/passive, male/female, and subject/object of desire.[81]

One of the most interesting ideas of this statement, is the idea of playing with gender. However, the purpose of this thesis is not to enter the debate raised by Queer Theory in this domain. I would simply like to acknowledge the fact that transgression of genders, interpreted in terms

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[80] Diane Richardson, 'Constructing Lesbian Sexualities', in *Modern Homosexualities:Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience* ed. by Ken Plummer (London:Routledge,1992),p.197.

[81] Colleen Lamos, 'The Postmodern Lesbian Position: On Our Backs', in *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. by Laura Doan (New York:Columbia University Press,1994)pp.97-98.

of performance, can be another way of decentring gender definitions and of redefining sexual practices as shown by Butler in *Gender Trouble:Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.[82] More central to my argument, is the idea that Irigaray's theory of female subjectivity can help to assert a fluidity of sexual roles and practices and act as a space of convergence for lesbian identities.

It is important to stress that identities constructed by the dominant discourse of heterosex can be displaced. To use heterosexual practices in a transgressive way is to change sexual norms since any deviation from these norms is considered to be a form of perversion, according to traditional psychoanalysis. Instead of deriving from normal heterosexual practices, lesbian penetration, for example, can be seen as a way of bypassing them . The act of penetration is still there but the meaning of the practice is entirely different since penetration in lesbian sex is just another sexual alternative expressing a choice in which there is no latent notion of hierarchy. This does not mean that practices, that is to say, what lesbians do, and meanings, in other words, what lesbians think they are doing, can be confused. Unlike heterosex where power relations are never totally absent, even if the symbolic or social power exerted by men is relinquished for a few

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[82] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble:Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London:Routledge,1990).

moments, as may be the case in sadomasochism, penetration or sadomasochism in lesbian sex are practices which cannot be understood as reactions to the dominant order or momentary wishes to escape it. They exist as sexual practices in their own right and as such can be said to be subversive. Moreover, lesbian penetration can be thought to be all the more subversive as it can not be linked to reproduction.

It should also be said, though, that penetration is viewed as a reiteration of the phallic economy by some feminists such as revolutionary lesbian feminists. According to them, penetration is a trap to avoid. It colludes with women's oppression. Jeffreys talking about new lesbian sexuality speaks as follows:

> The aggression and cruelty, the forcible penetration central to traditional men's pornography is in clear evidence...a new sexuality is being constructed for lesbians. It just happens to resemble...the founding fathers of sexology. It resembles neither traditional lesbian sexual practice, nor a vision of some different and revolutionary possibility.[83]

What Jeffreys does not explain is what, exactly, is traditional lesbian sexuality. On the other hand, she seems to think that lesbians are being created by this 'new sexuality', probably through the pornographers'demand. As I have already shown, lesbians can rethink sexual practices and displace their meaning through their own doing. In my

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[83] Sheila Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Heresy:A Feminist Perspective on the Lesbian Sexual Revolution* (London:The Women's Press Ltd,1994),pp.33-35.

opinion, penetration can be oppressive and function like a masquerade of male sexuality if it becomes the main component of lesbian sex and the finality of lesbian pleasure:

> [...] the concern is that in representing lesbian sex as primarily penetrative there becomes a pressure that lesbians should want to be touched or put objects in their vaginas - an expectation that passion means penetration.[84]

As women-identified women who have same-sex relations, lesbians who choose penetration as part of sexual practices can rewrite its heterosexist signification:

> Women who like penetration may feel ambivalent about it and wonder if it isn't 'sort of heterosexual'. Any technique two women use to arouse and please each other is a *lesbian* technique.[85]

In the case of lesbian porn and sadomasochism, opinions differ as well:

> A central question has to be whether lesbian porn is liberating or constricting for lesbians. Quite clearly some believe it is the former and it is certainly the case that recent lesbian porn has challenged the soft-focus, romantic imagery of lesbianism which, from a feminist perspective, can be regarded as oppressive. It is also true that lesbian porn differs in certain respects from heterosexual porn, for instance while the penis is often the only focus of genital satisfaction in heterosexual porn the emphasis in lesbian porn is on the woman's desire

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[84] Diane Richardson, 'Constructing Lesbian Sexualities', in *Modern Homoxexualities:Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience* ed. by Ken Plummer (London:Routledge,1992),p.197.

[85] Pat Califa, *Sapphistry:the Book of Lesbian Sexuality*, (Tallahassee,California:Naiad Press,1988), quoted in Tamsin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies:Setting an Agenda* (London:Routledge,1995),p.35.

and pleasure.[86]

Although both views make sense, it is still possible to argue that like lesbian porn, sadomasochism is very much a choice. It is also a choice in the context of heterosexuality but in that context, it is even more difficult, if not impossible, to ignore or eradicate what male supremacy stands for socially, culturally and politically. Sadomasochism, in heterosex, still revolves around phallic power. In lesbian sexuality, the emphasis is more on roles and their interchangeability. Power relations may be present but, there again, what matters is pleasure and not the prevalence of the Phallus or power relation based on sexual difference, even if roles are reversed between men and women. A submissive man and a dominant woman may appear to transgress the phallic order, hence the pleasure derived from this pseudo-transgression.[87] A man, for example, may enjoy submitting to a woman whom he may subconsiously think of as his mother or perhaps as a form of maternal authority. Therefore, even if the phallic power, in this instance, may seem to

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[86] Diane Richardson, 'Constructing Lesbian Sexualities', in *Modern Homoxexualities:Fragments of Lesbian and Gay Experience* ed.by Ken Plummer (London:Routledge,1992),p.198.

[87] Transgression, in this context, must be understood as a way of going beyond the norms imposed by the Freudian or Lacanian phallic economy which allocates heterosexual roles to men and women. These roles correspond to the mechanisms of duality expressed in terms of object/subject, domination/submission, activity/passivity already discussed.

be appropriated by a dominant woman, the transference of power is more a phantasy role-play than a rewriting of the dominant order which remains undisturbed.

But what happens in the case of two women playing with these roles? Answers differ. Some, such as Jeffreys, argue that heterosexual power relations are reiterated by lesbian sadomasochism, seen, again, as an effect of the dominant male culture. Others argue that sadomasochism is a way of reclaiming lesbian sexuality which has been 'desexualised' by some feminists.[88] Politically correct sex is also now judged by many lesbians to be insipid, hence its name: 'vanilla sex'. It is also said not to reflect today's reality:

> Lesbian sadomasochists ... and feminist lesbians ... rejected this analysis as more of what they had spent their lives fighting. Here was yet another moralistically motivated attempt to police women's sexual behaviour... 'when the radical becomes correct, it becomes conservative. The politically correct comes to resemble what it tries to change.[89]

This debate obviously questions the very idea of gender and the sexual roles attributed to it. One aspect of Queer Theory relevant to this argument is that the notion of gender can be disrupted by using the Phallus and some of its representation to serve the purpose of the Queer

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[88] References to Tamsin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies:Setting an Agenda* (London:Routledge,1995),pp.100-101.

[89] Tamsin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies:Setting an Agenda* (London:Routledge,1995),p.101.

approach:

> From a Queer position, she [the lesbian] is disrupting and decentering heterosexual masculinity by claiming the phallus as her own and exposing the performative nature of gender ... She is also, according to some readings, messing with Lacan's solipsistic assertion that woman = the phallus.[90]

One of the useful characteristics of this argument, as shown by Wilton in *Lesbian Studies*, is that identity has to be thought about in terms of identities which must be reorganised after having been deconstructed. This process means that masculinity can be decentred in several ways. The proposition which is the most pertinent to my argument is that lesbian identities can be thought of as woman, butch, femme, butch/femme, dyke, thus playing with the sexual meaning of female desire. If one accepts that lesbian sexual roles may vary, whether they are those of subjects or objects, the Phallic Subject can be decentred. In a postmodern lesbian perspective, the centrality of the Phallus does not play a prevalent part. Bodies are no longer unified bodies. One talks of organs such as the breast, the vagina, the phallus. New Techniques of Reproduction have emphasized this feeling of destructuration; with processes such as AID (Artificial Insemination by Donor) or IVF (In-Vitro Fertilization), as well as surrogate motherhood or Lavage Embryo Transfer, what matters are parts of the body and not the female or the phallic body.

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[90] Tamsin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies:Setting an Agenda* (London:Routledge,1995),p.104.

> "The body" is breaking up... bodies are both internally fragmented in response to the intrusions of biotechnologies and advanced surgical techniques... Lesbians in the public culture of postmodernity are subjects-in-the-making whose body of signs and bodies as sign are up for reappropriation and revision, answering as they do the party line of technology identity.[91]

Simultaneously, according to Griggers, lesbian sexuality is redefined by a variety of practices materialized by different sex toys emphasizing the wish to move away from the centrality of the phallic distribution of roles:

> [...] the lesbian assimilation of the sex toy industry is reterritorializing the culturally constructed aura of the phallic signifier. By appropriating the phallus/penis for themselves, lesbians have turned techno-culture's semiotic regime of simulation and the political economy of consumer culture back against the naturalization of masculinist hegemony.[92]

It seems possible to envisage a space of contiguity, in Irigarian terms, where female sexuality does not have to be limited to the economy of 'the solid' and where fluidity can work as an opening onto a variety of sexual practices. The Phallus, and the penis, can be replaced by various other erotogenic zones. Sadomasochism can be used as a negotiated form of sexual practice between lesbians. By displacing the central point of sexuality, namely

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[91] Cathy Griggers, 'Lesbian Bodies in the Age of (Post) Mechanical Reproduction', in *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. by Laura Doan,(New York:Columbia University Press,1994),p.123.

[92] Cathy Griggers,"Lesbian Bodies in the Age of (Post) Mechanical Reproduction", in *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. by Laura Doan,(New York:Columbia University Press,1994),p.121.

heterosexuality, lesbians subvert traditional sexual roles, by situating themselves as subjects and objects of desire, either alternatively or simultaneously. By reappropriating the female body, lesbians create a space where they act, by choice, as autonomous sexual subjects; they reformulate sexual practices and thus create a new sexual order independently from the phallocentrism. In this way, the Irigarian principle of '*l'ailleurs de jouissance*' can be said to apply to lesbian sexuality although it cannot be restricted to it.

However, disruption of the dominant sexual order is only the first step needed to bring about radical change. Without a politically organized discourse validating the multiplicity of sexual practices, no legitimization of minority identities such as lesbian identities seems possible. The notion of lesbian subjectivity cannot be a floating subject characterized only by the specificity of her sexuality. Rights are needed to materialize the power of her agency in society. Irigaray's theory of 'the Civil Woman' will now be examined by comparing her propositions with the demands made by lesbians in order to become citizens in their own right.

4. 'THE CIVIL WOMAN' AND THE POSITIONING OF LESBIANS AS CITIZENS IN THEIR OWN RIGHT.

Can the rights Irigaray demands for 'the Civil Woman' apply to lesbians? Can sexuate rights help to position lesbians as citizens in their own right?

First, two main areas Irigaray uses to define sexuate rights will be considered: initially virginity and motherhood will be addressed; a discussion on reproduction will follow. These areas will be assessed in terms of status and contract as I have shown that these two principles play a determining part in the making of 'the civil woman'. Secondly, the role of respect and duty defining the Irigarian notion of civility will be discussed in relation to lesbian citizenship.

4.1. Application of sexuate rights to lesbians.

4.1.1. Virginity

As already demonstrated in chapter Three, virginity has several meanings for Irigaray. The most pertinent aspect of virginity for lesbians would probably be the philosopher's equation of virginity with physical and moral integrity. Integrity, as autonomy and women's power over their body can be interpreted in different ways for lesbians. Irigaray claims that the female body should be regarded as being women's property instead of being

appropriated by the male economy of exchange. This assumption is relevant to lesbians because they are women, but also because the lesbian body should not be viewed in relation to its availability or lack of availability to men. By availability I refer to the fact that lesbians can be used as sexual objects of desire by men; lack of availability would mean that they are not, because they refuse to be, although they have a female body. In the first instance, women impersonating lesbians are used to stimulate male sexual fantasy, be it in terms of transgression or power. One can talk of transgression in the sense that the lesbian body can be perceived as a perverse body and hence be associated with forbidden sexual practices. This form of transgression is mostly exploited in pornography which uses lesbianism for commercial purposes. In this kind of scenario, the fact that women taking part in what is regarded as lesbian sex may or may not be lesbians, is not important. What really matters is to produce sexual scenes which will arouse men's desire. Pornography also plays with the notion of masculine power by frequently representing lesbianism as sex between a man and two women. This image is supposed to be empowering physically and symbolically for a man, as his presence proves that the physical relation between two women still needs to be mediated by the phallus.

The fact that the lesbian body is not considered to

have any reproduction potential also emphasizes the common idea that the lesbian body is available. With regards to the phallocentric economy of sexuality, the lesbian body can only be represented as a sexual object potentially available to men. If it is not, the lesbian becomes a body which is seen as either faulty or artificial.

In both cases, the lesbian body is still evaluated in terms of male desire. It exists for and through the male gaze; therefore, it has no identity or *raison d'être* of its own.

The second point which needs to be made, in relation to the notion of integrity, when applied to the lesbian body, is the fact that it is negatively perceived and labelled if it openly displays characteristics which do not adhere to the criteria of femininity required by heterosexual culture. Lesbians are portrayed as either butch, masculine, or inverts, as already shown.[93] All these traits are part of discriminatory practices or even aggression lesbians have to face on a regular basis.

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[93] Lamos contrasts the use of the terms butch/femme by heterosexuals with the lesbian discourse on the same expressions to show how complex these notions are. She shows that sub-categories of butch/femme are used in lesbian culture to reclaim various identities which aim to dislodge conventions and stereotypes used by heterosexuals and lesbians alike. Colleen Lamos, 'The Postmodern Lesbian Position:*On Our Backs*', in *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. by Laura Doan (New York:Columbia University Press,1994),pp.85-103,(p.96).

Conversely, if the lesbian body expresses femininity, lesbians are usually classified as 'normal' women and they can be desired by heterosexual men. It is often thought that 'feminine' lesbians are still looking for the right man.

Finally, if the lesbian body represents the queer body, in other words, if it subverts the boundaries of masculinity and femininity by being both masculine and feminine at the same time, or alternately, lesbians are then seen as abnormal, or as possibly masquerading gay identity, or even as playing with genders because they have not yet reached heterosexual maturity. They can also be rejected as being outside heterosexual models. More reassuringly for heterosexual discourse, perhaps, they can also be regarded as being bisexual, which would mean that the boundaries of sex identification are safe.

In all cases, the lesbian body and its representations, whether they are sexual, dress codes, body language, or hair styles, for example, are estimated to draw their meaning from the phallic economy. Critics such as Weeks, Wilton, Sedgwick and Lamos have shown that stereotypes associated with lesbians fix lesbian sexual practices and roles in the heterosexual divisions of gender. Lamos and Wilton also underline the importance of taking lesbian sexual practices out of the dichotomous butch/femme

category and instead, along with queer theory, they advocate 'genderbending' which questions the entire understanding of sexuality, be it heterosexual, lesbian or gay.

Lesbians do not have an identity of their own. Neither do they have a status representing their specificity which is what Irigaray demands for the female body. This means that difference and integrity, two characteristics of virginity in the Irigarian sense of the term, become exclusive. Difference, for Irigaray, implies that stereotypes attached to female identity are no longer relevant since woman's specificity is posited as legitimate. The integrity of the female body only exists if its specificity is legitimate. Following this line of reasoning, it could be said that the specificity of the lesbian body has to be recognized as legitimate in order to legitimize its integrity. Although lesbians are not exchanged as products of reproduction between men, the lesbian body can often be exchanged as a product of male desire or sexual fantasy. In this sense, I would argue that in dominant heterosexual culture, the lesbian body does not belong to lesbians any more than the female body belongs to heterosexual women. The lesbian body and the heterosexual female body, although for different reasons, are both posited, used or rejected, according to the cultural and political imperatives imposed by what Irigaray

calls hom(m)osexuality representing the patriarchal system of exchange. Hence, Irigaray's claim for rights legitimizing physical integrity as part of virginity is also relevant to lesbians.

Regarding Irigaray's interpretation of virginity as an expression of moral integrity denied to women in general, it seems possible to show that moral integrity is also denied to lesbians. Representations of same-sex relationships are condemned on the pretext that they are immoral as they do not adhere to heterosexual ethics. One example of this denial is the rejection of lesbians by institutions such as the Church, and armed forces. Moral beliefs are invoked to justify this disavowal.

The philosopher also uses the notion of virginity to politicize incest as shown in chapter three. As women, lesbians are victims of incest in the same way as heterosexual women are. The only difference is that incest is presented as having a definite impact on lesbian sexuality when lesbians have been submitted to it. There again, the principle of moral integrity seems to be absent. Incest, for many clinicians, psychologists or sexologists, is often considered to play a determining role in the psychosexual development of lesbians.[94] Hence, they

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[94] Analyses supporting this statement can be found in articles on sexual dysfunction and sociological/psychological characteristics of lesbian sexuality in *Historical, Literary and*

consider that lesbianism can then be treated as a pathology; it becomes a form of deviancy which can be cured. Such discourses reject lesbianism as a legitimate alternative sexual practice and support the idea that lesbians may be man-haters or man's replica. Choosing same-sex sexuality does in no way imply that lesbians wish to exclude men from other aspects of their life and yet this fact is often overlooked. Heterosexist beliefs fall back into the trap of the dominant dualism which structures fixed models and norms defining sexual identities. They exclude the possibility of accepting lesbianism as an option, a preference, a specific practice. Instead, the rational heterosexual order prefers to see lesbianism as a reaction to, or an inevitable consequence of sexual abuse or male domination. Lesbianism can also be presented as an incestuous relationship with another woman, which is another way of replacing lesbian sexuality in the heterosexual system of exchange and of presenting it as another form of violation of family structures.[95]

It must be said, though, that radical lesbian feminists

Erotic Aspects of Lesbianism, ed. Monika Kehoe (New York:Harrington Park Press,1986). A similar position is adopted by Masud Khan, *Figures de la Perversion*, trans. by Claude Monod (Paris:Gallimard,1979).

[95] This point is made by Annamarie Jagoze in a chapter entitled '"The Heart of the Law": Genre, Sexual Exchange and the Proper Name in *Working Hot'*, in *Lesbian Utopics* (New York:Routledge,1994),pp.97-137,(pp.123-124).

have reclaimed lesbianism as a way of counterbalancing the oppression of phallocentrism and patriarchy. Some lesbians may choose to think they are lesbians because they were born that way. However, I would argue again that it is less threatening to think of lesbianism as a pathology, a genetic defect or as an extreme consequence of feminism, rather than to question the legitimacy of heterosexuality as the only referent of normality.

Following the Irigarian interpretation of the phallic economy, I would argue that because lesbians are denied a status of their own, just as heterosexual women are, although mostly for different reasons, no contract can be drawn to legitimize their right to moral integrity in society[96].

4.1.2. Motherhood, reproduction and lesbian mothers.

Two main points will be raised here in response to Irigaray's propositions regarding specific sexuate rights for mothers. The first one is the notion of choice. Motherhood for lesbians is very much a matter of personal decision rather than an event corresponding to a normal stage in the life of heterosexual women. This does not mean that heterosexual women cannot choose or refuse to have children. They have the choice, but there is more

[96] This aspect will be analysed in detail in the last part of this argument.

pressure on them to become mothers and therefore most of them tend to take this fact for granted. The second point addresses Irigaray's demand for privileged rights for mothers. Rights, in this domain, often represent a crucial issue for lesbian mothers.

Irigaray argues that in the hom(m)osexual economy, women's role is indeed to reproduce; she talks about motherhood as a duty and also states that the female body is reduced to its reproductive capacity. "La mère garde la substance en tant que corps reproducteur et nourricier".[97]

For lesbians, motherhood is a different scenario. Women who have children can discover their lesbian sexuality after having experienced a heterosexual relationship. Conversely they may know they are lesbians but nevertheless enter a heterosexual relationship because of social and cultural pressures. In either case, they may have had children during these relationships. In this sort of situation, the choice of having a child or not is determined, first and foremost, by heterosexual imperatives.

Initially, the situation is different for lesbians who

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[97] Luce Irigaray *Sexes et Parentés* (Paris:Editions de Minuit,1974),p.145.

decide to have a child knowing they are prepared to accept the consequences of their lesbianism. Can their choice to have a child be regarded as a way of transgressing heterosexual norms and hence to avoid subjection to their regulation?

Having a child is not a private obligation for lesbians as it mostly is for heterosexual women. It certainly is not a duty imposed, directly or not, by the state either, as the second part of this debate will show. But the fact of becoming a mother or not cannot, in itself, be enough to outmanoeuvre the dominant system. Some heterosexual women decide not to have children and yet, although their choice is often disapproved of, they may even be asked to justify themselves, their refusal, in itself, is not enough to disrupt heterosexual family structures. One of the main reasons why lesbians can be said to transgress is due to their rejection of traditional values such as heterosex within the family unit. Most long-term lesbian relationships do not revolve around power relations typifying heterosexual couples. Studies have shown that lesbian relationships are, on the whole, more equal than their heterosexual counterparts because the partners involved are generally not trapped in the unavoidable roles men and women tend to fall into automatically, despite women's efforts not to reproduce these behavioural

patterns.[98] For example, partners in a lesbian couple are inclined to be more independent than heterosexual partners although common decision making and mutual assistance play an important part in their relationship. Sexual and emotional satisfaction are also more common than they are in heterosexual couples. But the very important thing distinguishing lesbians from heterosexual women is the feminist motto, 'the personal is political'. This catchphrase is even more relevant to lesbian life. Discrimination is part of lesbian daily life and their struggle to legitimize their identity and role in society is even more difficult than for heterosexual women. In this sense, being outside the phallic economy is not enough to assert their rights and existence as citizens.

In agreement with Irigaray, I would suggest that being outside the phallic economy is an indispensable initial stage which can enable women to reconstruct their identity. However, I am not so sure that the Irigarian 'Civil Woman', '*La Femme Civile*' can work as a paradigm for all women. On the one hand, it seems difficult to accept that a global model can represent all women and respond to women's needs in general. On the other hand, sexuate rights may not solve all women's problems, even if their purpose is to

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[98] Reference to studies on motherhood and lesbians carried out by Celia Kitzinger, *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (London:Sage,1987) as well as to an independent current study on lesbian couples carried out by Jill Dunn, Cambridge, to be published in 1997.

redress the balance between men and women. Indeed, this does not seem to be the case for lesbian mothers who could be said to be 'an exceptional category', at least as regards the patriarchal legal system.

Making this point enables me to answer two questions: is having a child, for lesbians, a way of reappropriating their body, and can specific rights for mothers help lesbian mothers to become independent from the dominant order? Both questions are formulated in the Irigarian perspective. For the philosopher, the reappropriation of their body by women is a priority. Sexuate rights, presented as a way of reclaiming the rights of '*La Femme Civile*', play a determining role in this process.[99]

The first thing which comes to mind is, how can lesbians have children outside heterosex? First, women can find a sperm donor on a private basis, be he heterosexual or gay. Secondly, it is also possible, although increasingly difficult, to use new techniques of reproduction, such as AIDS and IVF, when available. However, although the State emphasizes the need for women to reproduce, especially in France, many attempts are made to stop single women from having access to these techniques, especially lesbians. This position is common to France, the United Kingdom and

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[99] These points have been discussed in detail in chapter Three.

the United States. The following statement can be applied to the three countries:

> Most lesbians wishing to become pregnant can do so through either artifical insemination... Thus, although some states have... statuses that can be interpreted as prohibiting the artificial insemination of unmarried women... Denial of access to physician-performed artificial insemination is a serious concern in part because the parental rights of the donor may turn on whether a physician performed the procedure. Statuses that prohibit the artificial insemination of unmarried women should be invalidated as an unconstitutional restriction of the right to procreate.[100]

The authors also explain that, in the States, the Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized constitutional protection for the "decision whether to bear or beget a child". On the other hand, they also show that the Courts tend to protect the rights of unmarried persons to have abortion because denying this right would "interfere with bodily integrity". In other words, abortion is a right to preserve for unmarried persons, but procreation with access to artificial insemination, for example, becomes a much more complicated matter.[101]

Furthermore, mothers to be must correspond to certain criteria as shown by Wilton:

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[100] *Sexual Orientation and the Law*, ed. by The Editors of the Harvard Law Review (Cambridge, Massachusetts:Harvard University Press,1990),pp.139-140.

[101] *Sexual Orientation and the Law*, ed. by The Editors of the Harvard Law Review (Cambridge, Massachusetts:Harvard University Press,1990),pp.140-141, reference to the work of Robertson, 'Embryos, Families, and Procreative Liberty: The Legal Structure of the New Reproduction', *S. Cal. L. Review*, 59,(1986),960-965 (pp.962-964).

> Recent attempts by the British Government to restrict unmarried women's access to donated sperm enforce heterosexual compliance as the price of motherhood. This is not new; the male state has long attempted to control women's reproductivity... What we may naively believe to be a private and profoundly personal decision, whether or not to conceive and bear a child, is in fact blatantly at the whim of governments, whether democratic or despotic.[102]

Wilton also explains that patriarchal political discourses try to prevent women from minority groups such as lesbians or certain ethnic women from having children. In the United Kingdom, the availability of new techniques of reproduction for lesbians depends on the policy adopted by local councils. Although a few liberal councils, such as labour councils, may have an open approach to such issues, they may have to stop the availability of these techniques momentarily or definitely if the pressure of the conservative government is too great.

Private access is also possible although often costly. As shown by the Editors of the Harvard Law Review, some physicians, although in private practice, do use the pretext of unclear legislation to prevent lesbians from receiving artificial insemination. The same degree of discrimination also exists in France in this domain.

Another important problem for lesbian mothers is the right of their partner as regards the child. When two

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[102] Tamsin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies:Setting An Agenda* (London:Routledge,1995),pp.182-183.

lesbians have a child, only the biological mother is automatically the child's legal parent. In the United Kingdom, the mother's partner can be recognized as a co-parent and have the rights of a joint guardian.[103] The child can have the name of his/her biological mother and that of his/her co-parent. The co-parent must have been living with the child and his/her mother for a minimum of three years in order to be recognized as such. Common guardianship becomes legal if the two partners make a will. The co-parent is expected to take part in the upkeep of the child as well as in all other forms of care to which the child is entitled. However, in case of separation or death of the biological mother, the co-parent's rights can easily disappear if a heterosexual person, or a heterosexual couple related to the biological mother, demand rights of guardianship of the child. Although the Children's Act is supposed to prioritize the child's interest and demands, custody is usually given to heterosexual guardian(s) who is/are judged to be more suitable for the child's upbringing. This does not stop the co-parent from having to pay a child's allowance to the new legal parent(s) if she wishes to stay in touch with the child. Moreover, the new legal parent(s) can ask for all contact between the child and the co-parent to be terminated. If, in order to avoid all these difficulties, the co-parent was to adopt

[103] This data has been used to illustrate my argument since information related to lesbian mothering is more readily available in the United Kingdom than in France.

the child, the biological mother would lose her privileged rights over her child.

In the case of lesbian mothers who have been married previously, rights are different again. Depending on the judge who grants divorce, the ex-husband may well have custody of the child on moral grounds if the judge states that living in a lesbian environment is detrimental to the child. The ex-husband is supposed to pay maintenance for mother and child. But as the vain efforts of the Child Protection Agency have proved, it is often unsuccessful. All these measures apply to the United Kingdom.[104]

Very little if anything has been published in France as regards lesbian mothers' rights. It is partly due to the fact that, not unlike the United Kingdom, the rights of women as mothers do not take into account different categories of women. Child benefits, for example, are allocated to all mothers to encourage birth rate, regardless of their sexuality or identity. In a recent guide entitled *Homosexuels, 101 Réponses Pratiques*, some guidelines are given for gay fathers. I have assumed that the same rights apply to lesbians as they do not appear to

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[104] All information in this domain has been taken from the following sources: *Sexual Orientation and the Law*, ed. by The Editors of the Harvard Law Review (Cambridge, Massachusetts:Harvard University Press,1990). Rights of Women Lesbian Custody Group, *Lesbian Mothers' Legal Handbook* (London:The Women's Press, 1986). I have also interviewed lesbian mothers and their partners in England. They wish to remain anonymous.

form a separate category in the French legal system. In case of divorce, legally, custody of the child is not supposed to be influenced by the sexuality of the mother. "[...] l'homosexualité n'a pas d'influence de principe sur les modalités d'exercice de l'autorité parentale, sauf si elle présente un caractère d'instabilité". Obviously, the important thing here is the definition attached to the expression *'influence de principe'* which is often interpreted to the detriment of the lesbian parent since it is based on what the judge sees as stability or instability of this parent. "[...] l'homosexualité ... si elle présente un caractère d'instabilité, est un handicap à l'exercice de l'autorité parentale ou à l'attribution de la résidence habituelle de l'enfant par le juge".[105] The same prejudice exists in the United Kingdom.

Problems for lesbian mothers also exist with respect to benefits. In the United Kingdom and in France, a lesbian mother, in order to receive benefits has to be registered as a single mother living on her own. This obligation is damaging mainly for two reasons: firstly because it forces the lesbian mother to deny her status of mother within a couple. Consequently her identity as a lesbian mother as well the identity of her partner as a co-parent are ignored. In other words, by denying lesbian

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[105] Jean-Marc Florand & Karim Achoui, *Homosexuels:101 Réponses Pratiques* (Paris:Librairie Générale de Droit et de Jurisprudence,1993),pp.32-36.

couples with children the right to receive welfare benefits, the state is attempting to erase what they call 'pretend families'. In fact, it would be in the interest of the state to acknowledge the legitimacy of lesbian couples and their children. If these couples were entitled to the same benefits as heterosexual married couples, the benefits received by lesbian mothers would be less costly for local authorities and the government than the payments made to single mothers, despite the fact that the amount of these benefits is being gradually cut beyond all level of acceptability in the United Kingdom.

As an 'undeserving' category, lesbians cannot benefit from housing benefits reserved for heterosexual couples.

> Benefit entitlement, pension rights, housing policy and education all assume (and act to ensure) women's dependency on men and the primacy of their role as mothers... The Welfare State depends upon women's unpaid domestic labour, so it is in the interests of the state that gender roles be unquestioned... A social policy structure founded upon and intended to support a traditional heterosexual division of labour penalises women who are unattached to men and/or who are mothers... Women's access or lack of access to a male wage determines their access to housing, their standard of living... and the degree of control they can exercise over their lives... unmarried mothers (a category which, by default, includes lesbian mothers) are discriminated against in local authority housing practice.[106]

Although agencies and institutions, including welfare institutions, encourage co-tenancy since it is in their

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[106] Tamsin Wilton, *Lesbian Studies: Setting An Agenda* (London:Routledge,1995)pp.188-189.

interest to have two tenants or mortgage holders rather one. Lesbian couples with children, nonetheless, cannot benefit from housing policies applied to heterosexual couples. There again, lesbians are held as valid consumers but they are not recognized as couples. The situation is fairly similar in France where a landlord can refuse to rent accomodation to a lesbian couple as one of the partners is not recognized as a common law wife or partner.

> Le bailleur peut obtenir parfois la résiliation du bail, c'est à dire le départ du locataire ou son expulsion par force, si le locataire s'engage à occuper le logement à titre personnel ou au profit de son conjoint ou concubin... La notion de concubinage étant reservée aux couples hétérosexuels.[107]

The authors also add that if only one of the partners has signed the housing agreement, the other one has no rights in the tenancy since she is not regarded automatically as a joint holder of the lease as a heterosexual partner would.

Lesbian partners are recognized and used as consumers. Their financial responsibility is encouraged whilst their legal rights as co-parent or tenant are non-existant. The state double-edged discourse means that lesbian parents, like lesbian bodies which are treated as sexual products of exchange, do not have any legal status and therefore are invisible before the law.

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[107] Jean-Marc Florand & Karim Achoui, *Homosexuels: 101 Réponses Pratiques* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Juriprudence,1993),p.82.

Because of these denials, Irigaray's propositions of sexuate rights as specific rights for mothers may be interesting. They could be used to fight discrimination and act as a means to redress the balance with heterosexual women. They could also help to position single lesbian mothers as heads of family, be they biological mothers or co-parents.

In the case of new techniques of reproduction, the situation is different. These methods do not help lesbians to reappropriate their bodies as legal systems endeavour to deny them access to these facilities. Potential lesbian mothers are even more dependent than heterosexual mothers on the male-run institutions which make decisions as regards the lesbians'right to give birth. The discrimination they suffer can be seen as a breach of moral integrity, since lesbian parents or future lesbian parents are constantly demonized. Another point, which is relevant to lesbian and heterosexual women, is that the female body, is in the hands of scientists who are mainly men. This point has been made by Irigaray .

> [...] les hommes ne sont pas du tout absents des technologies de reproduction. Ils y sont même extrêmement intéressés par le biais de l'argent. La prostitution fait de l'argent sur le sexe des femmes, la procréation artificielle en fait sur le ventre maternel.[108]

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[108] Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Pour une Culture de la Différence* (Paris:Grasset,1990),p.160.

Irigaray's sexuate rights cannot work if these rights are seen to only apply to a unique model of female citizenship, that of *'La Femme Civile'*. This would imply that sexuate rights would end up subsuming specific categories of women such as lesbians. But some of the rights claimed by Irigaray such the right to physical and moral integrity can be used by lesbians to reformulate the way in which their status as citizens in their own right can be repositioned in contemporary society.

4.2. 'The Civil Woman' and the construction of lesbian citizenship.

As shown in chapter Three, Irigaray argues in favour of *'La Femme Civile'* so that women can acquire a legal status positioning them as citizens in their own right. She also wants to legitimize sexuate rights to guarantee women's integrity and autonomy. I have demonstrated that the role of *'La Femme Civile'* in society depends on the relationship between civility and sexuate rights, on the understanding that civility can only function as a form of contract based on respect and duty between men and women. Can this model inspire the construction of lesbian citizenship?

As already argued, as neutral citizens, lesbians can benefit from the rights heterosexual women enjoy. But as

openly declared lesbians, they do not exist.

> [...] as asexual citizens they possessed formal equality; as homosexuals they were both denied official recognition/protection and subject to constant and changing medical 'diagnoses'; as 'lesbians and gay men' they created positive, affirming community structures and cultures. The development of lesbian and gay movements, therefore, followed from both production of this distinctive identity, and its perceived exclusion (or inclusion as criminal or pathological) within dominant discourse.[109]

As is the case for heterosexual women, at least in Irigaray's perspectives, the lesbian struggle for equality is based both on the defence of their specificity and on the desire to fight rejection or discrimination. Herman follows Mouffe's argument to show that, in most capitalist societies, subjecthood or social agency is measured in terms of equality which is the central focus of Western consciousness. So, in accordance with this postulate, it seems reasonable to assume that, if lesbians had the same rights as other citizens, whether they are heterosexual women or men, they would also be recognized as subjects. But is this really the problem? For instance, lesbians benefit from the same consumerist rights as those offered to the heterosexual population. So how do they differ?

The liberal discourse tends to accept lesbians as a minority group which must be tolerated. Their difference

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[109] Didi Herman, 'The Politics of Law Reform: Lesbian and Gay Rights Struggles into the 1990s',in *Activiting Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Johnathan Bristow & Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp. 246-263,(p.249).

should be understood because it can be genetically explained, at least, in most cases, and after all, lesbians have always existed, so this evidence, in itself, is enough to indicate that this state of affairs is unavoidable. According to liberal thought, lesbians belong to a minority who, as such, must be protected from discrimination. The protectors, of course, are represented by leading authorities whose role is to decide what is best for lesbians. These comments are inspired by Herman who states:

> Liberal legalism, upon which rights laws are premised, thus assumes a series of unassailable truths: society is pluralistic, there are majorities and minorities, true democracy necessitates the protection of minorities from the tyranny of majorities, and true minorities share characteristics that differentiate them from the majority's 'norms'. The majority must exhibit qualities of tolerance, ... and compassion, ultimately evidenced by their willingness to extend legal protection to identified minorities.[110]

The problem with the liberal approach is that the majority has to accept, or rather, put up with lesbians, because as a dominant group, the majority possesses 'qualities of tolerance' and hence can establish itself as a guardian of morality. Lesbianism, on the other hand, is seen as a defect typifying a minority group which derives its identity from this defect; thus lesbians are

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[110] Didi Herman, 'The Politics of Law Reform: Lesbian and Gay Rights Struggles into the 1990s',in *Activiting Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Johnathan Bristow & Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.246-263,(p.251).

automatically placed in a submissive position by comparison with the majority group which, because it is supposed to represent norms, becomes the ruler who can be more or less magnanimous. As a compliant group requiring protection, lesbians are thus deprived of what Herman calls 'conscious agency'. If lesbians are protected by dominant heterosexual rules, these rules could justify protecting them from themselves; this could mean that lesbians are pressurized to renounce their lesbianism for their own good, or indirectly persuaded to 'become' heterosexual. For example, denying them rights and benefits such as marriage, when wanted, right to a partner's pension or inheritance, rights to adopt, which are rights heterosexuals take for granted, can work as a surreptitious way to have lesbians adhere to dominant codes.

Heterosexual discourse can also extend citizens' rights to lesbians, for instance, the right to acquire a common property. This right is valid in France and in the United Kingdom. However, like heterosexual married couples, a lesbian couple can acquire a property without any problems, but making sure that both partners have automatic rights to it if one of them dies can prove to be very difficult if a will has not been made.

> [...] en l'absence de testament, le partenaire homosexuel survivant n'héritera pas automatiquement des biens du défunt... le survivant ne peut pas rester dans le logement appartenant au partenaire défunt contre la volonté de ses héritiers légitimes,

il peut être expulsé.[111]

The same legislation is applied in the United Kingdom.

As far as fostering a child is concerned rights do vary. In the United Kingdom, when fostering by two lesbians is allowed, the children put into their care are usually difficult older children and mentally or physically disabled children. Fostering by lesbian or gay couples is rare.[112] In France, fostering by lesbian or gay parents does not seem to take place.

The adoption of a child by a lesbian can be envisaged although discouraged as she is not thought to be a suitable parent.

> Non, l'homosexualité de l'adoptant n'est pas un obstacle légal à la procédure d'adoption mais est un sérieux handicap... car elles [les juridictions] lui sont généralement défavorables, car elles considèrent que l'intérêt moral de l'enfant se concilie mal avec l'homosexualité de l'adoptant.[113]

The same principles are implicitly ratified in the United Kingdom. It is interesting to note that the adoption or guardianship of a child by a co-parent is not mentioned at

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[111] Jean-Marc Florand & Karim Achoui, *Homosexuels: 101 Réponses Pratiques* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Juriprudence,1993),pp.65-66.

[112] The problems of fostering by lesbian or gay parents have been highlighted in the context of a series of programmes on lesbian and gay rights and culture called *Out on Tuesday*. This programme was produced by Channel Four in 1994.

[113] Jean-Marc Florand & Karim Achoui, *Homosexuels: 101 Réponses Pratiques* (Paris: Librairie Générale de Droit et de Juriprudence,1993),p.36.

all. However, the adoption of a child by a lesbian couple is absolutely impossible legally. On the other hand, a lesbian is still entitled to receive maintenance from her ex-husband even if she lives with her female partner, be it in France or in the United Kingdom.

In an indirect way, what the liberal discourse is saying is, if you behave as 'good' lesbians, that is to say, as we want you to behave, by not making your lesbianism too visible, you will be allowed certain rights. This could be interpreted as what Irigaray calls neutrality. If one stays neutral, in other words, if heterosexual women adhere to the rules of the dominant economy, they will be allowed to enter society as participating agents modelled on the male paradigm. As far as lesbians are concerned, it works in the same way. If they are prepared to accept the unspoken rules of heterosexual discourse, they will be tolerated. In both cases, negating one's own identity is the basic condition of acceptance. The terms of the contract work on two levels: first, on a principle of co-option of lesbian cultural practices by the dominant discourse and secondly, on the demand of erasure of lesbian specificity in order to acquire the status of universal citizenship. Lesbians rights, in this scenario, are no more valid than heterosexual women's rights, '*Les droits de la personne*' which are neutral rights aiming to subsume female identity,

as demonstrated in chapter Three, as well as identities of minority groups such as lesbians.

Even when rights are acquired in accordance with the right to difference, they are not always successful. Lesbians can also be excluded by the rights they have obtained to protect themselves from discrimination. As Herman points out, very often, a system can create fragmented identities by enforcing liberal rules on minority groups.

> [...] anti-discrimination provision is a 'disciplinary regime'. It functions as such by constructing a 'classification of identities' - categories of persons who are, in some way,'lesser than' an unstated norm. These legal regimes create fragmented identities, and people are forced to compartmentalise their complex subjectivities in order to 'make a claim'... the result is not to make a claim at all. Instead, individuals construct their 'problem' as trivial, view human rights law as ineffective anyway, and often get more satisfaction from 'sacrificing' themselves (by not complaining) than by 'losing control' through entanglement in bureaucratic procedures.[114]

This statement emphasizes the difficulties lesbians have to face when confronted with harassment at work, or demand for custody of children for example. Like women who go to court after being raped, they can often end up becoming the

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[114] Didi Herman, 'The Politics of Law Reform: Lesbian and Gay Rights Struggles into the 1990s',in *Activiting Theory: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Politics*, ed. by Johnathan Bristow & Angela Wilson (London:Lawrence & Wishart,1993),pp.246-263 (p. 252).

defendant, symbolically the 'accused', and not the victim.[115]

To avoid more problems linked to discrimination, many lesbians choose to confine themselves to the limits of private spheres. However, this is also a crucial issue for at least two reasons. If the private stay private, heterosexual morality is safe. The liberal idea that what is private should stay so reinforces the negation of lesbian identities and practices. On the other hand, the private should be made public, if for no other reason than, at least, to make lesbians visible to people so that they can perceive lesbians as an alternative identity and not as a deviance or a defect. In Britain, since 1988, when the Local Government Act was introduced, the provisions of Section 28 of the Act stipulated that certain practices thought to be perfectly natural for heterosexual people would be criminalized for gays and lesbians.

> Lesbians and gay men are criminalised for 'offences' which are not offences in a heterosexual context: any public show of affection, holding hands, kissing in the street, can and do lead... lesbians with public order or assault offences... The negative overtones of the bill... show that... [this] will undoubtedly cause an increase in homophobia.[116]

The aim of Section 28 was to forbid what was presented

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[115] A more detailed analysis of women's right to integrity and rape has already be presented in chapter 3.

[116] *Section 28 and the Youth Service: An Information Pack*, ed. by Mary Beaman (London: London Union of Youth Clubs,1988).

by the Thatcher government as the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities run by the Left. Section 28 affected areas related to education, free expression in public places, in the workplace and in the production of arts and literature; it also made the access to rights for lesbians even more difficult. Co-option by the dominant system usually accentuates lesbian invisibility, and the allocation of certain rights may lead to rejection or demonization of lesbian minorities. Yet, women are often absent from political debates. They are sometimes subsumed by the category 'lesbian and gay men' and can be assimilated with gay men's identities and practices. Thus has been the case during the campaign for the lowering of the age of consent for gay men in the United Kingdom. Lesbians did not have to be represented in this debate; the age of consent does not apply to them. Lesbians are women and, as such, the age of consent is 16 as for heterosexual women in the United Kingdom and 15 in France.[117]

In order to remedy the absence of lesbians as such from the political discourse in general, or to make lesbians more visible in gay and lesbian activisim, it is necessary to materialize the status lesbians should have by giving them the opportunity of positioning themselves as

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[117] The issue of the age of consent for women is discussed in chapter Three.

legitimate and autonomous citizens in society.

> To be prohibited explicitly is to occupy a discursive site from which something like a reverse-discourse can be articulated; to be implicitly proscribed is not even to qualify as an object of prohibition... It is one thing to be erased by discourse, and yet another to be present in discourse as an abiding falsehood.[118]

The Irigarian notion of civility, with regards to lesbians'rights, would entail the negotiation of a contract, the terms of which would be based on the respect for the integrity of lesbian identity and practices. Specific statuses would therefore be needed. The notion of duty would be guaranteed by the access to equal rights and benefits like any other citizen. Respect would also refer to the idea that the state's intervention in the life of lesbians should not be the colonizing of lesbian relationships by forcing them to model their lives on heterosexual models.

Irigaray's concept of sexuate rights can be useful to lesbians as its aim is to legitimize the existence of an oppressed group, that of women. Bearing in mind that it is best employed on specific occasions to redress the balance of inequalities, Irigaray's model of citizenship, '*La Femme Civile*', could operate as a point of reference, used to renegotiate the social contract supposed to

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[118] Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination', in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. by Diana Fuss (New York:Routledge,1991),pp.13-31,(p.20).

guarantee equal rights for all citizens.

Conclusion

I have interpreted Irigaray's image of 'the two lips' as a symbolic representation of a relationship between two women. In this context autonomy, respect, multiplicity of desire as well as fusion define the principle of contiguity contained in 'the two lips'. The role of contiguity can therefore be considered to enable lesbians, as women, to create a space in which they can posit themselves as autonomous sexual subjects whose sexuality is independent from the phallic economy. Contiguity can also enable lesbians to reclaim their sexuality if, as I have argued, contiguity is understood in terms of fluidity of roles and identities. Following the logic of this reasoning, it would seem reasonable to assume that two female partners can act as self-referents, without having to masquerade or return to the heterosexual dyad in order to prove their legitimate existence.

As far as contiguity gives the lesbian sexual subject a legitimate status in the symbolic, it can also be considered to be a way of fighting the notion of neutrality attached to principles of citizenship. Firstly, it means that lesbians, as women, do not have to become men's replica in order to be positioned in society. Secondly, lesbians do not have to be subsumed by the uniformity of status defining heterosexual women. Sexuate rights

claimed for 'the Civil Woman' can be used as a basis on which rights aiming to make lesbians visible can be rethought. According to Irigaray's theory, affirming visibility is a way of politicizing women's existence. In my opinion, it should also be a way of making differences between women more apparent and this includes differences between lesbians. Irigaray's '*Femme Civile*' marks the philosopher's firm intention to establish women as agents in society. In France, lesbians do not have any legal status. In order to be expressed, their demand for rights equivalent to those enjoyed by heterosexual women or heterosexual couples has to be integrated in a general contract, '*le Contrat d'Union Social*,' which is a project for a social contract aiming to reformulate rights for minority groups.[119] If the demand for the legitimization of lesbian identity and rights were to be formulated independently, it would automatically be rejected or ignored. Conversely, some of the rights claimed by Irigaray, such as specific rights for mothers, or rights to integrity, could help lesbians to acquire a legitimate position in society and to speak as citizens in their own

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[119] '*Le Contrat d'Union Sociale*' is a project supported by various members of political movements and parties of the Left, such as '*Les Verts*', '*Socialisme et République*', *Mouvement des Citoyens*, *PS*, *PC*, '*GPL*', '*Gai pour les Libertés*', '*HES*' '*Homosexualités et Socialisme*' as well as members of '*SOS Racisme*'. Politicians, academics, such as Derrida, Bourdieu and Perrot, lawyers and activists from these parties or movements have prepared a bill aiming to give heterosexual and homosexual partners the same rights as heterosexual married couples.

right.

Nevertheless, '*La Femme Civile*' can also be interpreted as a paradigm which ends up ignoring differences between women. It may be because Irigaray's priority is to legitimize female citizenship, so that women, as a distinctive group, have the power to name. In this context, the power to name refers to women's right to become actively involved in the ruling of the polis. According to the philosopher, if '*La Femme Civile*' can be recognized as a legitimate female subject, the very principle of universality can be reformulated: "Il convient... d'interroger la nature et l'universel existants comme une particularité, des particularités".[120]

For Irigaray, universality, '*l'universel*', is divided in two parts, one representing men and the other women, who are equal but different. Women's role is to materialize their subjectivity by legitimizing the specificity of their genealogy as men's genealogy is already established.[121]

> L'universel devient alors le résultat... d'un retour à la réalité et non d'une construction artificielle... Mon appartenance à l'universel est de reconnaître que je suis une femme. La singularité de cette femme est d'avoir une généalogie et une histoire particulières. Mais appartenir à un genre représente un universel qui existe avant moi. Je

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[120] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992)p.67.

[121] The notion of genealogy is discussed in chapter 2.

dois l'accomplir dans mon destin particulier.[122]

The philosopher thinks that if women can be part of universality, on an equal footing with men, this achievement would cancel out inequalities, be they between men and women or between the various groups constituting society. This is why, in her work, as briefly mentioned in chapter Two, lesbians do not need to be posited or recognized as a specific category.[123] In Irigarian terms, lesbianism, as a possible example of women's sociality, '*l'entre-femmes*', can be used as a momentary strategy. This strategy works as a transitory phase in women's life which aims to disrupt the dominant order and to give women the possibility of reconstructing themselves as subjects. However, lesbianism does not have to be part of women's life.

Consequently, '*La Femme Civile*' can only be used as a referential framework within which certain aspects of lesbian citizenship can be rethought.

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[122] Luce Irigaray, *J'Aime à Toi:Esquisse d'une Félicité dans l'Histoire* (Paris:Grasset,1992)p.73. The question of universality is also explained in chapter 2.

[123] My interpretation of Irigaray's text was confirmed during an interview I had with her in June 1992. She specified that the rights claimed for women by using the concept of '*La Femme Civile*' included all women whose identity was asserted by the legitimization of the female subject. Specific groups, such as lesbians, did not need to be represented as such.

CONCLUSION

The denunciation of the subjugation of the female subject by patriarchal order is common to many feminists. However, what is particularly interesting in Irigaray's approach, is her constant insistence on the importance of recreating a symbolic space where female subjectivity would reflect the specificity of the female subject and the autonomy of her self.

Following Irigaray's critique of Western Thought, it has been shown that the divisions imposed between men and women result from a unique vision imposed by the dominant order, interpreted in this debate as the male dominated order which has the power to impose beliefs and models of identity. Lacan's theory of symbolic order negates the female subject who is either a lack, an absence or a replica of the male subject whose privileged status in the symbolic guarantees his position of power in society. In Hegelian philosophy, women are confined to a state of pre-consciousness and pre-rationality. The female subject is enclosed in her immediacy and has a limited role as a citizen. Men's function is to engage in relative thought and self-development as well as in the making of the civil society and the state. As demonstrated in chapter One, the arbitrariness of these mechanisms of domination are presented as neutral and universal and can be understood as an act of symbolic violence which deprives women of

the power to name. I have shown that for Irigaray, symbolic violence exerted by the male economy has to be fought on two fronts: symbolically and socially. According to the philosopher, the alliance between the symbolic and the social is the only way of generating effective and lasting changes in society. Social and symbolic are therefore inseparable and interactive. It is important to stress that Irigaray's concept of the social-symbolic can be understood as a practical solution to women's oppression. It cannot be thought of as a philosophical theory exclusively. It is not a form of utopia either. The purpose of her project is to materialize the idea of the social-symbolic by generating cultural practices defining female genealogy and sexuate rights for women in general. This is why in chapter Two, I have suggested that her proposition to create female genealogy can be seen a possible solution, or at least as a guideline, which can be adopted to rearticulate a space for women as subjects of enunciation. In the context of this discussion, the social symbolic is analysed as the legitimization of the sensible transcendental presented as a process consisting of two stages. In its first phase of realization, the sensible transcendental corresponds to the rehabilitation of the association between matter and spirit. Recognizing the validity of the sensible transcendental corresponds to acknowledging that a reconciliation between body and meaning can be used to

understand how reality, truth and knowledge are constructed.

In practical terms, the idea of female genealogy is also interesting as regards women's visibility as a genre in its own right. Symbolically, because female genealogy would legitimize the female subject and therefore enable women to become progressively aware that they belong to a legitimate group. On a political level, female genealogy would enable women to instigate cultural practices such as non-gendered linguistic practices as well as generate positive representations of women's roles and identities. The purpose of such cultural transformations is to legitimize the function of female citizens in society by gradually remodelling the collective unconscious. I have also suggested that the role of female genealogy is to reflect the evolution of female subjectivity together with the history of socio-cultural practices relevant to women's everyday life, independently from the history of patriarchal subjugation.

In my opinion, the role of female genealogy is to give women the basis and the impetus they need to affirm themselves as autonomous citizens whose legitimacy has to be confirmed by a social contract. This first step has to be completed before women can start cooperating on an equal footing with men.

The second phase of realization of the sensible-transcendental can be said to be represented by *'le travail du négatif'* marking the female and the male subjects' recognition of their own limits as legitimate speaking subjects. According to Irigaray the function of the 'negative', *'le travail du négatif'*, is to enable men and women to eventually write a common history of universality by engaging in the practice of intersubjectivity. Respect for the sensible transcendental, *'le spirituel concret'* is essential to this process. "Parler à l'autre demande de ne pas le réduire à soi, de n'en faire ni son objet, ni son moi... Ecouter l'autre est le premier chemin pour respecter sa différence".[1]

As indicated in chapter Three, sexuate rights are essential to the implementation of respect for Sexual Difference. It can certainly be argued that Irigaray's propositions based on *'La Femme Civile'* and *'Civilité'* indicate the logical progression of her desire to materialize and politicize the symbolic status of the female subject in society. Sexuate rights specific to women must not only be understood as rights in the sense of claims or entitlement to what is due to them as citizens. The very idea of sexuate rights does also depend on moral or legal justice. The notion of rights,

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[1] Luce Irigaray, 'La Rédemption des Femmes', in *Le Souffle des Femmes: Luce Irigaray présente des credos au féminin*, ed. by Luce Irigaray (Paris:ACGF,1996), pp.183-211,(p.199).

for Irigaray, is closely linked to that of culture, the culture of the social symbolic based on the respect for women's right to self-determination. The right to virginity and integrity is one example. Virginity is not limited to the respect for the female body as an autonomous entity. It is also the respect for moral integrity, that is the moral duty not to use women as products of exchange between men, symbolically or culturally, and the respect for the female self, corresponding, in this context, to what Irigaray calls '*le droit de la personne*'.

Irigaray's propositions in the domain of sexuate rights can be assessed vis à vis principles of freedom, equality and fraternity. As already suggested, Irigaray's equivalent could be read as freedom, equality in difference, and solidarity between men and women which she sees as the foundation of a culture of 'Civility' between subjects and, consequently, citizens.

Within the context of Sexual Difference, freedom can be understood as autonomy of status and existence for both genres based on the respect of their own specificity. Equality can be interpreted as equal access to symbolic representation for male and female subjects, and to the power to name as well as to the right to participate equally in the ruling of the polis for male and female citizens. Nonetheless, equality cannot be equated to

neutrality which, for Irigaray, is only a way of disguising male presence and domination. Neutrality, in the Irigarian discourse, is used to coopt women so that female identity becomes imperceptibly erased. Finally, solidarity can be regarded as cultural practices giving precedence to 'being', '*l'être*', over 'having', '*l'avoir*'. '*L'être*' is defined in terms of legitimacy of status and hence of presence, that of the speaking subject in the symbolic and in society. Presence also depends on the quality of intersubjective exchanges, which, according to Irigaray, should replace the priorities of the specular or the Phallic economy, '*l'avoir*', relying on principles of ownership and accumulation of powers.

> La seule façon de surmonter les relations Maître/Esclave, c'est d'avoir des droits propres à l'homme et à la femme qui correspondent à leur identité propre, à l'intégrité civile et morale de chaque identité. Il faut se détacher du droit de la personne au bien pour repenser les droits des hommes et des femmes ou nom de l'humanité.[2]

It can therefore be said that autonomy of status, equality in difference and solidarity constitute the basis of '*Civilité*' which functions outside the contract made by the brothers, that is, outside the law of fraternity as it is implicity formulated in the French republican motto.

It is important to contextualize Irigaray's latest work

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[2] Statement made by Luce Irigaray during our discussion on sexuate rights, in June 1992 in Paris.

vis à vis the current feminist debate on identity politics. To do so, the relevance of '*La Femme Civile*' to lesbians has been examined.

The Irigarian concept of contiguity, interpreted as a derivative of 'the two lips', is developed to show that the lesbian sexual subject can reclaim her sexuality as her own, independently from the phallic discourse on female sexuality. Contiguity can be construed as the expression of fluidity. It can also imply that roles and identities can be flexible within a relationship between two women. This means that lesbians can subvert traditional sexual roles by situating themselves as subjects or objects of desire. By doing so, I have suggested that they reappropriate the female body and posit themselves as autonomous sexual subjects. Thus, it is possible to see Irigaray's '*ailleurs de jouissance*' as a possibility for lesbian sexual subjects to disrupt the imposed norms of heterosexual order and to bring about cultural changes making lesbian visibility unavoidable. I have also argued that the function of contiguity is to counteract the principles of neutrality contained in the very notion of citizenship. By creating a space where the abstraction of the citizen can be questioned, contiguity gives lesbians the possibility of inscribing the specificity of their identity in society. Sexuate rights play a part in the accomplishment of this process.

Irigaray's intention is not to design a project aiming to implement sexuate rights to respond to the demands of specific categories of women such as lesbians. The philosopher's position is explained by the fact that, according to her, a lesbian culture cannot exist as such. As demonstrated in chapter Two, '*l'entre-femmes*' when it applies to lesbians, is only a preparatory phase towards the repositioning of women as legitimate subjects and citizens. Lesbian relationships may be accepted as a practice of '*l'entre-femmes*', though they are never distinctively mentioned as such. In Irigarian thought, lesbians are accepted as a group of women rather than recognized as a group with a specific identity and needs. The rights Irigaray claims for the female subject and citizen involve two protagonists: the male and the female subjects whose responsibility is to rearticulate the principles of universality.

However, some of Irigaray's claims for sexuate rights could be used to legitimize lesbians'visibility. The right to physical and moral integrity, as well as the right to self-determination are relevant to the recognition of the status of lesbians in society. Specific rights for mothers also apply to lesbians when these rights give lesbian mothers the opportunity of fighting discrimination and of positioning themselves as legitimate heads of the family.

Thus, Irigaray's propositions regarding the legitimization of the female citizen can only work as suggestions to be progressively adapted to the lesbian struggle for status and rights.

Throughout this thesis I have demonstrated that Irigaray's propositions for a female genealogy legitimized by sexuate rights can be practically applied to women's everyday life. I have interpreted '*La Femme Civile*' as Irigaray's answer to the dominant male order. At first, the very idea of '*La Femme Civile*' may seem to offer a solution to the male dominant discourse which is too global, especially if it is taken as a rigid model of female identity and a set of cultural practices. However, most cultural practices relevant to '*La Femme Civile*' can work as references which can be used as a common ground for distinctive issues. These cultural practices can also be adapted selectively for specific strategies, organized by different groups of women who are committed to generating changes related to the status and the position of women as citizens in their own right. Cultural practices aiming to develop women's integrity and autonomy are two areas which can be used to increase women's visibility and power to name in society, whether they are heterosexual or lesbian. These issues could be taken into account by groups involved with movements such as *Parité* or *Le Contrat d'Union Civile*.

Interpreting Irigaray's principle of 'Civility' as a series of recommendations for female citizenship means that other areas of Irigaray's work could be further explored. For example, it would be interesting to assess the extent to which '*La Culture de la Différence*' could be relevant to black women's debate on power relations between black and white women. For instance, the following could be raised: should black women be able to define their own priority for transformation, rather than accept solutions such as those offered by '*La Femme Civile*' presented to them by white feminists?

The validity of sexuate rights could also be examined by looking at the differences experienced by women whose life is structured by hierarchies of racism and ethnicity and class.

Another area to be discussed is Irigaray's view on the pertinence of the implementation of quotas and equal opportunity policies in France. According to the philosopher, quotas only have a limited role to play in the process of legitimation of women as subjects and citizens. This point of view could be analysed in the context of the debate led by the current French feminist movement *Parité*. The women and men involved in this movement have different views on the role of sexual difference vis à vis quotas and parity. Like Irigaray, their aim is to reformulate

principles of citizenship and to increase women's participation in the ruling of the polis. Some women, such as Elizabeth Guibert-Sledziewski and Françoise Gaspard, think that women must have access to power as women.

> Il convient ...que ce soit en tant que femmes qu'elles revendiquent leur intégration à égalité dans la cité, d'autant que les institutions politiques témoignent d'une résistance particulière pour les y admettre.[3]

Others, such as Christine Delphy, refuse to acknowledge the very concept of sexual difference. Irigaray's argument for sexuate rights is therefore perfectly relevant to the project *Parité* is presently fighting for.

The emphasis Irigaray puts on the vital interaction between the symbolic and the social is not only intellectually challenging, but it is also an integral part of the feminist struggle of the 1990s for the reform of citizenship. Irigaray's most recent work clearly tackles some of the main issues which are at the centre of current feminist debate. Her ongoing research on '*La Femme Civile*' and practices of '*intersubjectivité*' show that her main concern is now to give a pragmatic and political dimension to Sexual Difference in order to instigate durable changes in contemporary society.

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[3] Françoise Gaspard, 'De la Parité: Génèse d'un Concept, Naissance d'un Mouvement', NQF,15 (1994),29-44 (p.41).

APPENDIX 1

Feminist studies referring to Hegel's Master/Slave theory:

Christopher J. Arthur, 'Hegel as Lord and Master', in *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy: A Radical Philophy Reader*, ed. by Sean Sayers & Peter Osborne, (London:Routledge,1990).

Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (Paris:Gallimard,1949);

Seyla Benhabib,'On Hegel, Women and Irony',in *Feminist Interpretation and Political Theory*, ed. by Mary Lyndon Shantey & Carole Pateman (Cambridge:Polity Press,1991),pp.129-145.

Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman* (Oxford:Martin Robertson & Princeton University Press,1981).

J. Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York:Columbia University Press,1987).

D. Coole, *Women in Political Theory: from Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism* (Hemel Hempstead:Harvester Wheatsheaf,1988).

Catherine Larrère, 'Histoire', in *Nouvelle Histoire des Idées Politiques*, sous la direction de Pascal Ory, (Paris:Hachette,1987).

G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male'and 'Female'in Western Philosophy*, (London:Methuen,1984).

APPENDIX 2

Droits des femmes entre 1982-1993
Bilan législatif.

. La loi du 31.12.1982 assure la couverture des frais afférents à l'interruption volontaire de grossesse non thérapeuthique et aux modalités de financement de cette mesure.

. La loi du 13.7.1983 sur l'égalité professionnelle (loi Roudy) interdit de refuser une embauche, une promotion ou une formation en raison du sexe ou de la situation de famille. Elle prévoit, dans les entreprises de plus de 50 salariés l'établissement d'un rapport annuel au comité d'entreprise analysant la situation comparée des hommes et des femmes.

. La loi du 23.12.1985 pose l'égalité totale des époux dans la gestion des biens des enfants mineurs.

. La loi du 18.1.1991 autorise la publicité relative aux préservatifs et autres contraceptifs. (The aim of this law is in fact to help prevent the spread of Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases rather than make men more aware of their responsibility during sexual contacts with women!)

. La loi du 22.7.1992 , loi contre le "harcèlement sexuel", est relative à la repression des crimes et délits contre les personnes, et porte réforme du Code pénal.

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