

Silence, exit and the politics of piety: challenging logocentrism in political theory

Sophia Dingli and Sameera Khalfey

Abstract

This chapter rejects the reduction of the phenomenon of silence in political life to violence. In the first section of the chapter we trace the reductive conceptualisation and subsequent lack of theoretical engagement with the phenomenon of silence, to the logocentric understanding of legitimacy developed in Western political thought in response to the ontology of the unbound subject. The chapter juxtaposes works of feminist international political theory that provide problematic readings of silence, with the intentional practices of silence-as-exit, performed by Muslim women in the context of the resurgence of piety in Egypt, Turkey and beyond. In so doing, we aim to illustrate that the prevailing understanding of silence in political theory is bound by an equally particular hermeneutic horizon as that which informs Muslim women's decision to exit the political. This allows us to highlight the importance of reconceptualising silence in general and silence-as-exit in particular, and to highlight the questions raised, specifically in relation to the issue of legitimacy and ethics, as a result.

Introduction

This chapter, like the rest of this volume, takes issue with the reductive conceptualisation of the phenomenon of silence in political life as violence and with the phenomenon's under-theorisation which we partly attribute to the logocentric conceptualisation of legitimacy in much of modern political theory. We specifically take issue with the misidentification as violence (or as a reaction to violence) of performances by which marginal-to-power agents exit political processes, retreating to the private realm, thus becoming politically/publicly silent. These performances of silence-as-exit from politics, we argue, are neither violences to be excised nor performances of agency which are of little consequence and that political theorists should ignore. Instead, we show that some such silences are expressions of agency, defined here as 'the pursuit of what is good in a particular concrete case by agents with limited powers and resources' (Geuss 2008, p.30-31), that can only be understood from within the structures and discourses that condition its enactment (Mahmood 2012, p.15). The chapter focuses on the silence-as-exit entailed in the performance of piety particularly undertaken by Muslim women. Their particular exit from politics does not necessarily share the characteristics of the politics of exit-as-resistance examined elsewhere (Kirkpatrick 2017). This is because, as we show, their exit signifies acquiescence, submission and docility to received moral/religious norms. Therefore, their silence does not speak directly to politics via resistance. At the same time, these silences *are* politically significant because they are indicative of the plurality of our world thus illuminating the limits of our understanding. Recognising them as such is crucial since mis-recognition by reading them through a logocentric and Eurocentric frame begets violence. It is thus imperative that we theoretically engage with these silences if political theory is to reflect the plurality and complexity of our world and the inherent difficulty of political and ethical judgement.

In the chapter's first section we trace the identification of silence with violence and the lack of nuanced engagement with the phenomenon, to the ontology of the modern unbound subject. For this subject the only legitimate limits in political life are self-chosen and choice can only be expressed by an explicit, thus voiced, expression of consent. We demonstrate the prevalence of this understanding of legitimacy and its connection with the interpretation of the phenomenon of silence, particularly of silence-as-exit, through a discussion of the works of four feminist international political theorists: Cynthia Enloe, Seyla Benhabib, Iris Marion Young and Gayatri Spivak. These works differ significantly in terms of their particular theoretical viewpoint, thus offering a representative cross-section of feminist thought which has always been concerned with silencing and with questions of legitimacy and ethics. This section demonstrates how silence is either solely theorised as violence or not theorised at all. The limitations and implications of the particular interpretations of silence entailed in these works is demonstrated in section three which discusses the resurgence of performances of what Saba Mahmood called the 'politics of piety', manifested in the feminisation of Islamic authority in a variety of Muslim-majority states, and in the resurgence of veiling among Muslim women. This section demonstrates the agency entailed in this particular type of political silence, thus challenging and highlighting the limitations of the prevailing logocentric framing of silence. Through juxtaposing works of *international* political theory, which is often presented as offering the view from 'nowhere' that addresses political and ethical challenges 'everywhere', with particular intentional practices of silence-as-exit, we aim to illustrate that the prevailing understanding of silence is bound by an equally particular hermeneutic horizon and to highlight the questions raised, specifically in relation to the issue of legitimacy and ethics, as a result.

Silence, the bound and unbound woman and the problem of legitimacy

In this section we argue that silence in political theory is almost exclusively understood in negative terms due to the fact that our predominant conceptualisation of legitimacy, understood as the recognition of the authority of a government, law or norm which engenders obligations, presupposes the use of logos. In other words we argue that since we understand the establishment of legitimacy in logocentric terms, silence in modern political thought can only be conceptualised as either an absence or as a violent exclusion. To demonstrate this, we offer a brief historical account of the rise of the question of legitimation as the most important political question and illustrate that the modern conceptualisation of legitimacy is tied to a particular ontology of human nature.

First it should be noted that the question of legitimacy did not dominate the lives of the ancients, in contrast to the lives of the moderns and post-moderns. This is because the lives of the ancients were defined partly by an innate certainty born of the belief that there was a link between the cosmos and earthly existence and that the 'rational principle'-a life in accordance with Reason- was knowable through science and dialectics and related to politics through practical wisdom and rhetoric. A comparable certainty characterised early Christianity whereby God was characterised by his goodness and Reason and was partially accessible through human reasoning (Elshtain 2008, p.1-28). This certainty was shattered by the victory of nominalism over scholasticism. Henceforth, God became characterised by his sovereign will which was unknowable to humans. The consequences of this change are to be found first in the severing of the link between the cosmos, politics and law and secondly in the eventual emergence of the concept of the sovereign self – created in the image of

the strong, sovereign God. Both developments sowed the seeds of the emergence of the problem of legitimacy; a problem whose solution today often has no place for silence.

One of the most important attempts to provide an answer to the problem of legitimacy is found in John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*. In the background of Locke's seminal work is the relatively new conception of the rational sovereign self which found expression in the work of Descartes. This conceptualisation of man as rational, sovereign and unbound even by his own materiality, became cemented in Kant's work and was expressed most radically in the work of existentialist philosophers like Simone de Beauvoir. Today it finds expression in what Michael Freeden (2015, p.2) called a wide predilection 'to regard people as rational autonomous purposive agents'. Of course this predilection is not without critique. For example, feminist political theorists have argued that this conceptualisation of the political subject is not only hyperbolic but that it also denies the material, embodied and affective conditions that make it a possibility for some political agents and not for others (Hutchings 2013, p.16). Similarly, post-colonial scholars show how the myth of the unbound subject was produced and was productive of the violent encounter between the West and non-Western subjects (Mehta 1999). Others deny the possibility of such a subject since this conception wrongly presupposes that it is possible for one to be rational and transparent to herself and that one's subject positions are unified and homogenous (Laclau and Mouffe 2014, p.101). Nevertheless, this subject is at the centre of the question of legitimacy as conceptualised by most liberal and critical political theorists. What is more, she is also presupposed in the works of ardent critics of this conceptualisation, as J Maggio (2007, p.438) argues in connection with Spivak's radical work on silence, which we discuss later.

In light of the above, the question for Locke was how to enact sovereignty legitimately, in the absence of a sovereign prince and in a political climate where religion and politics were increasingly separated (Elshtain 2008, p.122). In other words Locke sought to establish what obliges autonomous, rational individuals to be subjected to laws that limit the range of their freedom of choice. To answer this question, Locke began with an analysis of the metaphorical state of nature, arguing where men's nature is revealed as one of perfect freedom (Locke 1980, p.8). Such men come together to form a community 'for their comfortable safe and peaceable living.' Locke (1980, p.52) continues to say that 'every man, by consenting with others to make one body politic under one government, puts himself under an obligation, to every one of that society to submit to the determination of the majority'. The original metaphorical act of consenting to the social contract is re-enacted by the continuous expression of consent to the rule of law which may be voiced – a declaration of consent for example- or tacit and therefore silent, implied in the use of public goods ministered by the state.

For us, the importance of Locke's account lies in the inclusion of tacit, hence silent, consent - precisely because this element is excluded from almost all subsequent theorisations of legitimacy. Indeed, since Rousseau logos acquired utmost importance. This was partly because speech has been considered to be an authentic expression of truth in Cartesian political philosophy- as Karl Petsche outlines in his contribution to this volume (chapter 7). Henceforth the expression of the general will, which Rousseau argued forms the basis of a legitimate government, took the form of deliberation among representative legislators and a vote on the specific laws to be enacted by the sovereign. In

this account, the general will was never perceived to be wrong, as Rousseau argued that ‘an admirable accord between interests and justice’ is created when each submits herself to the conditions she imposes on others (Rousseau 2011, p.175). The significance of Rousseau’s account of legitimacy lies for us in the inattention to existing practices and their acknowledgement which was alluded to in Locke’s account of tacit consent.

Indeed, logos has become increasingly important in accounts of legitimacy ever since. For example, critical theory gave birth to the quest for authentic logos in politics; that is logos which expresses individuals’ and groups’ true interests rather than the interests one adopts in conditions of domination. Only such logos can form the basis of legitimate norms and governments. Furthermore, liberal theorists since the second world war have attempted to establish the conditions under which, at least ideally, everyone who is subject to a norm can be consulted in its formulation and consent to it. Habermasian communicative ethics and Rawls’s theory of justice are the most illustrative expressions of this. In other words, increasingly since the Enlightenment, political theorists have conceptualised legitimacy solely in logocentric terms, presupposing that the unbound-self is the subject of political deliberation. As a result, the phenomenon of silence in political life has been increasingly interpreted (if at all) as a result of violence which prevents subjects from expressing their interests and preferences and exercising their agency in the political process. In the extreme, silence as a concept is invoked to illuminate the impossibility of legitimate political arrangements since no such subjects can exist. Conversely, where ‘exit’ is considered in connection to legitimacy, it is usually conceptualised as an expression of individualism/autonomy, resistance and of escape from a higher authority (Kirkpatrick 2017, pp.9-11). Thus, we can infer that intentional silence-as-exit can only be conceptualised as a reaction to domination.

Silence in feminist international political theories

This second section illustrates the effect of the logocentric understanding of legitimacy -which is bound by the particular hermeneutic horizon of Western political thought- on how silence is, or is not, conceptualised in the works of Enloe, Benhabib, Young and Spivak. Throughout we demonstrate the ways in which logocentrism limits these works’ ability to effectively theorise the phenomenon of silence in political life *and* therefore to take the implications of the multi-modal character of silence (Dingli 2015) into consideration when theorising legitimacy and ethics in the international context.

Our discussion begins with Cynthia Enloe’s seminal *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* where she raised the question of women’s role in sustaining relations among states. Driven by curiosity about the experiences of women within and beyond the proverbial centre of international politics, Enloe explored subjects previously considered out of the purview of the discipline including global sex tourism, prostitution around military bases and Carmen Miranda. By so doing Enloe became acutely aware of the discursive silences of the discipline and the marginalisation of her subjects in practice. In her 2004 work *The Curious Feminist* she takes on silence itself arguing that these subjects are ‘so naturally marginal, silent and far from power that exactly how they are kept there could not possibly be of interest to the reasoning, reasonable explainer.’ (Enloe 2003, p.22) She goes on to theorise this silencing in discourse and practice as the result of the exercise of incredible amounts of power which keeps women at the margins from having the language or volume to be heard. Enloe ends

(2000, p.196) *Bananas* by arguing that the personal is international and the international is personal. These were statements meant to challenge not only the public/private divide but to challenge the divide between the private and international. This is a conclusion by which she stands today (Enloe et al. 2016) and it unsurprisingly led her to also call for a 'feminist international campaign' to deal with the issues created by patriarchy and militarism.

Enloe's work is appreciated for its inventiveness and interdisciplinary while it has also been challenged for its unacknowledged partisan character. Enloe's presuppositions were and remain universalist, privileging the individual over and above the group. This led her to argue that any recourse to culture that excuses what she presumes to be violence should not be accepted. As such, she fails to acknowledge the possibility that women's gender identities and presumed violences they suffer as a result are silenced because they are subsumed by other parts of their identity including their cultural, state and family affiliations, as Lene Hansen (2000, p.287) argues. In other words, Enloe's work presupposes the unbound subject. Therefore, she assumes that women anywhere, given the right attitude -namely curiosity about how the international structures our personal lives- would come to the same conclusions, join in the same struggle and adopt similar ends. Enloe's work is therefore animated by a vision of universal emancipation from the twin structures of patriarchies, militarism, and the cultures that sustain their myths. Other than curiosity, she argues that conversation is important in this task. She interestingly likens the type of conversation she favours to teaching which is respectful but 'push[es] the envelop', the envelop presumably being the emancipation of every woman from patriarchy that would allow her to live a worthwhile life (Enloe et al 2016, p.548).

For Enloe one may presume that performances by women at the margins of political power which signify the removal of one from the public to the private and thus their exit from politics would be either incomprehensible or taken as evidence of domination. Something similar may be said about Jane Parpart (2010, p.16), who shares Enloe's universalism and but differs in acknowledging that the performance of silence may express 'empowered choices/agency for women in an often masculinist, dangerous, conflict-ridden world.' Thus in a universalist account of feminist international political theory, silence performed for reasons other than emancipation and resistance, remain incomprehensible and thus theorised as an outcome or reaction to violence. No other interpretation seems possible. The first reason for this may be contextual, since silence in feminist writing and theory has always signified violence, secrecy and/ or resistance. The second, is the complete politicisation/ internationalisation of the private realm, which leads to the presumption that irrespective of context, all relations and performances must be subjected to political contestation in order to establish their legitimacy or illegitimacy. This of course necessitates voice. Finally, a norm's legitimacy or illegitimacy is not established according to contextual factors but subject to universalist standards, which presuppose the specific understanding of the self and social and political relations sketched in the previous section of this chapter.

This uniform universalist account has been problematised by Seyla Benhabib who took on the problems that particularity poses for an account of universal ethics. Though her work is not explicitly feminist, in it she problematises Habermasian discourse ethics through a discussion of gender, which represents the aspects of concrete identity overlooked by his abstract universalism as well as the limits of particularist claims (Benhabib 1992). Before delving in Benhabib's arguments, it

should be noted that the account of legitimacy of discourse ethics posits that all subjects affected by a norm must be involved in its formulation and therefore in its validation (Hutchings 2005, p.159). In attempting to reconcile the demands of this conception of legitimacy, as well as to ameliorate the issues created by both particularism and universalism, Benhabib (1992) -unlike Habermas- argues that a dialogue between generalised others does not adequately capture our predicament. Thus she argues that discourse ethics entails a dialogue between concrete others which requires empathy.

The limits of this account become clear in *The Claims of Culture* where Benhabib (2002) develops her account of a 'pluralistic enlightened universalism'. In *Claims*, Kimberly Hutchings (2013) argues, gender is often invoked as a warning against strong multicultural claims for group rights. Benhabib roots her argument in an account of cultures as hybrid and ever-changing which she juxtaposes with an account of linear, universal, moral learning. The account of particularity as malleable and universality as linear find expression in the principles of a weak transcendentalism and of a historically enlightened universalism. The first is based on the principles of universal respect and egalitarian reciprocity, while the latter's main achievement is the 'generalised moral attitude of equality toward human beings' (Benhabib 2002, p.40). These positions structure her theorisation of the moral discourse of universalism and particularism and inescapably lead to the exclusion of a number of identities and types of argumentation (Hutchings 2005, p.161), whose versions of the good do not entail the maxim that persons are not to be seen as means but as ends in themselves. Further, they lead to the assimilation of difference to sameness through a lack of appreciation of the asymmetry of the subject positions of the interlocutors in moral discourse (Young 1997, p.346; 354), as well as to a problematic account of linear political temporality (Hutchings 2009, p.123). As Iris Marion Young argues, Benhabib's theory results in denying the other's difference (Young 1997, p.346) in a way that 'displaces and silences the other, as she might speak in a different, incommensurate register'. Following Young, we may conclude that Benhabib's theory allows her to ventriloquise but hearing one's voice come out of the mouth of another cannot be taken to be an adequate way to deal with the problem of difference.

Benhabib's discourse ethics is therefore different than Enloe's liberal universalism, in that she recognises the importance of difference, which leads her to grapple with particularity. Furthermore, her account of a dialogue of concrete rather than generalisable subjects, seemingly places all interlocutors on the same plane, unlike Enloe who seems to elevate the role of universal feminists to that of a teacher. However, on closer inspection, this levelling of the field privileges the universal over the particular, as Hutchings and Young show. For our purposes, Benhabib's discursive account of legitimacy combined with her particular rendering of international ethics, seems to identify political silences as instances of violent exclusion, the sort of difference which is inadmissible in the discourse of the particular and universal. Alternatively, performances of silence-as-exit from politics by marginal (to power) subjects are unintelligible by virtue of being outside the discourse of modernity (Benhabib 2002, p.186). As a result the implications of these silences for our understanding of legitimacy and ultimately of international ethics are not confronted and silence as a phenomenon remains unexamined, presumably because inconsequential.

Iris Marion Young (1997, 354) tackles part of the issues created by Benhabib's account by foregrounding the asymmetry of subjects in her reformulation of discourse ethics. She argues that discourse should start from the acknowledgement of 'difference, interval, that others drag behind them

shadows and histories, scars and traces, that do not become present in our communication.’ This posits moral humility as the only response to our limited ability to understand the other, since we are all ‘differently socially positioned’ (Young 1997, p.355), at all times - even when we are constructing something in common through discourse. A condition of discourse, which is based on the acknowledgement of deep historically-produced differences, is the willingness to suspend one’s own assumptions and the adoption of a sense of wonder at what is alien to our own experience but intrinsic to that of the other. Young’s account is a dialogical one, which nevertheless would not inscribe the other’s silence with the assumptions of universal morality, as Benhabib does. In other words, Young recognises that she is, as we are all, bound by a particular hermeneutical horizon which prevents her from hearing the other clearly even if the other speaks. Nevertheless, as an account of political legitimacy based on discourse which takes place in the public realm, Young’s account does not explicitly deal with the implications of the phenomenon of political silence even though it does much to ameliorate the exclusions produced by Benhabib. Thus political silences remain, in Young’s account, notable by their absence and their implications do not come to bear on her account of international ethics.

Gayatri’s Spivak (1988) emphatically answered her own question in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* with a resounding no. Her argument as to the silence of the subaltern is multilayered. Partly, she argues, like Young, that this silence is a product of our inability to listen rather than the others’ capacity for expression. However, our inability to listen and their silence is not solely a result of different social positions and of deep material inequalities. Instead, the subaltern and their silence signify the limits of the hermeneutical horizon of subjects who are speaking from the authority of existing hegemonic discourses. In this reading, discourse itself is inscribed with violence since its goal is to assimilate alterity (Dhawan 2007, p.310). Spivak’s argument is derived from the linguistic turn in philosophy. This turn pitched liberal and critical theorists who viewed speech as the result of the self-expression of the emancipated against post-structural theorists who argued that language in itself is exclusionary since every concept is an attempt to represent reality, homogenising it and in the process excluding alterity (Dhawan 2007, p.311).

Spivak’s theory sees discourses of particularity and universality, that are themselves gendered, raced and classed, as inherently violent and constituted by power. She demonstrates this through a reading of *sati*, the ritual suicide of Hindu widows, which was read as criminal by the British administrators in India keen on ‘saving brown women from brown men’, and as voluntary by Hindu men (Spivak 1988, pp.94-111). She goes on to show that the British reading of *sati* was Eurocentric, gendered and simplistic. At the same time, she illustrates the ways in which *sati* was already subjected to the hegemonic interpretation of privileged/speaking Hindu subjects. As a result, the intentions and voices of the widows were silenced and never registered. For Spivak the silence of the subaltern is always necessarily the product of violence and exclusion. She argues that these exclusions result not from particularist discourses, like patriarchal Hinduism for example, but from discourses *qua* discourses and the inequalities of power that produce them. Furthermore, Spivak does not argue that thinking at the limits engenders productive possibilities, only continuing foreclosures for the subaltern. It is therefore unsurprising that Spivak’s own solution to the problem is to suggest that “‘we have to learn to work together in silence.’” (quoted in Dhawan 2007, p.311) This is a solution that denies the possibility of establishing legitimate norms. Furthermore, as Maggio argues, Spivak’s account seems to presuppose the existence of privileged speaking subjects on the one hand

and of a clearly self-conscious subaltern whose voice we can never hear. In other words, in her solely negative reading of silence-as-violence, Spivak does not escape the presuppositions of Western political thought. At the same time, her positive rendering of silence as an escape from the violence of discourse cannot be a solution to the conundrum of legitimacy. Instead it gives us another example of the sort of silences we argue that political theory must account for and demonstrates the need for a plausible theory of legitimacy which is not logocentric.

Silence-as-exit and the ‘Politics of Piety’

Assumptions of Islam posit a faith that is detrimental to the freedom and rights of women. This discourse puts forth that ‘Muslim women’ need saving from customs and religious practices (Abu-Lughod 2013). These customs are predominantly read as violent, silencing mechanisms because they confine women to the private sphere and bind them in ways that do not allow them to express their choices or preferences. As a result, the political systems they find themselves in are read as necessarily illegitimate from the standpoint of political theories that read legitimacy through logocentric lenses. Consequently, liberal feminist movements both within and outside the Middle East, identify any support for Islamic practices by Muslim women as instances of false consciousness which have the effect of ultimately silencing those women further. A stark example of this was FEMEN’s reaction to Muslim women’s disapproval of the organisation’s campaign of naked protests against veiling (Dingli 2015, p.730). In commenting on this disapproval, FEMEN’s leader Inna Schvechenko stated that Muslim women ‘write on their posters that they don’t need liberation but in their eyes it’s written “help me”’ (Inna Schvechenko, quoted in Gordts 2013). Shevchenko’s remarks are predicated on an unwillingness to engage with the worldview of Muslim women themselves and to recognise them as agents. At the same time Schevchenko, and others who adopt similar logocentric frames, constitute these women as objects of interventionist policies. In this section we engage with works that expound on ‘Muslim women’s’ worldview to contextualise performances of silence-as-exit from politics and to argue that these are indeed, in many cases, expressions of agency exercised in the pursuit of the Good Life rather than indications of its violent stifling. We do so by first engaging with the contextual factors (structures and discourses) which give substance and meaning to these silences and secondly by engaging with instances of such silences as expressions agency and conditions of empowerment. This, of course, should not be taken to mean that we assume all instances of silence-as-exit from politics to be expressions of agency, nor that they all are conducive to empowerment within particular contexts. Indeed, part of the importance in theoretically engaging with the phenomenon of silence, beyond logocentric assumptions, is in recognising its inherent ambiguity and multi-modal character. In turn, this recognition illuminates the immense difficulty of ethical and political judgement in our plural, increasingly connected world.

The literature of visible and invisible feminism provides a good starting point for the contextualisation of performances of silence-as-exit in the public-political. Works that distinguish between the two argue that significant agency is not only public but also private, inclusive, in the case of Islam, of women’s role in the education of their children and in ensuring that men follow the dictates of faith. This is important for our discussion since it rescues agency ‘from being understood as an exclusively public and explicit phenomenon’ (Badran and Cooke 2004, p.xxvi). This entails that si-

lence in the public realm cannot be automatically assumed to be an indication of violent domination, nor as just an absence of no consequence. This literature is premised on the recognition that the public-political/private-moral divide western political thought assumes to be natural and neutral, and which determines the sort of (public) agency which is valued and counted, has little correspondence in the Islamic context where the moral permeates both spheres. This makes distinguishing between the two spheres difficult, because they are fused, and valuing one over the other interpretively unhelpful. This, in turn, poses questions about the devalorisation of the private sphere which takes place when agency is only attributed to one's public actions, especially to their willingness or ability to speak, where not doing so is considered an indication of the existence of violent domination. Margot Badran's work, which highlights these aspects shows us that de-prioritising the private sphere often disempowers women. Thus, she invites us to examine invisible and/or private acts of agency and acknowledge their value in the specific context we find them. This we do below.

The understandings of the Good Life within which the private sphere is regarded as valuable or more valuable than the public -as well as the near-historical development of this understanding- is of course important for a nuanced reading of particular performances of silence. This understanding of the Good Life, for our case, is to be partly found in the edicts and discourse of 'true faith' which structures the actions of women on the basis of what is believed to be required of them by their faith. Women (and men) whose motivations lie in 'true faith' believe that living the Good Life -in this world and the next- is strongly linked to following the edicts of religion, including abiding by the division of public and private, which is dictated by the strictures of Islamic faith. Of course, as we show above, the indistinguishability of the private and public and the importance of morality across, colour this context within which some women find empowerment. Criticism based on the argument that these women suffer from false consciousness fails to even entertain that women may be willing to operate within this bound context since doing so fulfils the particular desire of pleasing God. Doing so is a condition in the successful pursuit of the Good Life.

Of course, adherence to 'true faith' is not an essential characteristic of Muslim majority countries or societies. Indeed, the 1950s saw a move away from Islam and towards secular, Western-inspired liberalisation in all affairs including women's rights. However, gradual disappointment in Westernisation and in the promises of nationalism and Pan-Arabism, especially in the aftermath of Nasser's humiliation during the Six Day War, cemented anti-Western sentiments and gave birth to a post-colonial backlash. Modernisation, in this context became increasingly negatively associated with 'Westernisation' (Mishra 2017) and as such, alternative forms of politics, with goals contrary to the above emerged. The rise and increasing influence of political Islam exemplified through the popularity of organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood, must be read in this context.

In connection with women's movements, this set in motion alternatives, which defined themselves in direct contrast to state-sponsored feminism. In the literature this movement is explained as an attempt to reclaim the women's movement from state control and to resist secularisation (Al-Ali 2002) and the concomitant increasing participation of women in the public sphere which created deep cultural dissonances (Ahmed 2011, p.77). For example, Elizabeth Bucar's work highlighted the fervent disapproval of 'feminism' by some powerful Muslim women: for Shahla Habibi, special advisor on women's affairs to former Iranian President Hashimi Rafsanjani, 'feminism' was identi-

fied with the West and with characteristics at odds with the cultural, religious and historical backgrounds of Middle Eastern societies (Bucar, 2010). Bucar's research highlighted the emergence of a particular kind of women's movement. These movements sought to disassociate with what they termed colonialist ideologies, which they identified with the feminism of illiberal democratic regimes like Pahlavi's Iran, Mubarak's Egypt and Assad's Syria. Furthermore, they allowed for the participation of women across all class boundaries, something that secular, liberal feminist politics did not do (Al-Ali, 2002).

This shift in political culture, also brought a shift in the politics of subjectivity. Paul Anderson (2011), for example, argues that we should view the trend to re-veiling, which is one practice by which women signal themselves as silent/private even when in public, through the prism of a Foucauldian pursuit of establishing moral and ethical boundaries that determine another self to the unbound self of the West. Islam in this reading provided a system of daily practices, a way of life and ethical and moral principles which formulate a sense of identity distinct from that of the West. This sense of identity, interestingly, is not tied to the nation-state; therefore, it is as post-Westphalian as the identity of the liberal globalist (Shani, 2008). The trans-national nature of religious identity also allowed for the spread of ideas and a greater sense of community that goes beyond the local. The veil, for example, is one way in which Muslim women beyond Muslim majority states connect with their religious identity and visually represent this across the globe.

Veiling, therefore, is one of the performances of silence-as-exit from politics, defined as performances by which one signifies themselves as private, because it signifies that, 'a woman carries "her" privacy and sanctity with her.' (El-Guindi, 1999, p.95) We can only attempt to adequately understand veiling as an instance of agency and not as its deprivation by taking into consideration the discourses, structures and practices which give it meaning. First among these the importance of privacy and its meaning for Muslim women. Fadwa El-Guindi's (1999, p.96) argues that the veil is 'about sacred privacy, sanctity and the rhythmic interweaving of patterns of worldly and sacred life, linking women as the guardians of family sanctuaries and the realm of the sacred in this world'. In *Veil*, she undermines simplistic understandings of the veil as a single signifier of oppression and reaches beyond true faith narratives to include identity politics, resistance, and fashion as well as historical practices and socio-economic factors that affected the movement toward piety and performances of political silence among Muslim women. Furthermore, El-Guindi highlights that in allowing women to signify privacy in public, veiling became a way in which they could retain their untouchability and respectability in the context of their increased presence in public spaces. In other words, veiling enabled their public presence and also secured their empowerment within orders that valued modest women (Watson 1994, p.137-38).

Similarly to the practice of veiling, the women's mosque movement, whereby young women began studying Islam in a more formalised manner within the mosque, emerged as a means to re-centre faith in daily life. This was explicitly contrary to the processes of secularisation and/or westernisation which were described by the participants to the movement not as empowering but as 'transformative force beyond their control,' (Mahmood 2005, p. 44). Thus the movement became a means to ground everyday practices in the 'bodily aptitudes, virtues, habits and desires' of Islam. (Mahmood 2005, p.45) This was not formulated as a direct challenge to the political order, but as a shift in the socio-political practices of the women who took part in the movement. The movement,

in other words did not have a public character, and did not engage with the state in a political confrontation. Indeed the movement's and individual women's public silence/exit was a necessary condition for its flourishing, as Mahmood (N/D) argues. Engaging in political contestation, she notes would have seen the movement subsumed and destroyed by states. Therefore, silence-as-exit from politics enabled the participants of the movement to take action toward living their lives within their self-ascribed system of beliefs.

Therefore, the women's mosque movement exemplifies the claim put forward by Mahmood and which we share, that agency can only be read in the context of specific systems, discourses and structures and not through the presumptions of the unbound self. Furthermore, this example allows us to see the concrete ways in which silence-as-exit performed by marginal-to-power subjects *is* an instance of agency, which in turn creates the conditions for agency and empowerment within the private rather than the public sphere. This second aspect is well illustrated by women *dā'iyāt* (religious teachers), that Mahmood presents in her work. Religious dress, which varied amongst the teachers from cloaks and headscarves to full nikab and gowns, partly signified their political silence as did the religious, hence private/apolitical/moral, character of their practice. Whilst liberal feminists would have interpreted this as domination, Mahmood's work illustrates that it was a means to attain the position of teacher and to practice their *dawa* (proselytising) within the domain of the patriarchy – the mosque. In other words, political silence-as-exit enabled their agency. Through *dawa*, and religious teaching women *dā'iyāt* affected change within the mosque since their knowledge allowed them to challenge or change predominant views, like whether women can lead other women to prayer (Mahmood 2005, p.87-91) Furthermore, by becoming figures of religious authority, women *dā'iyāt* provided feminised spaces within the mosque which proved to be transformative for their female students. Their public silence, which Mahmood cautions us to not read as resistance to patriarchy but as following on from the desire to please God, allowed them to exercise their agency in transformative ways, changing the social from within.

Mahmood's work focuses on the Egyptian mosque movement, however many more instances of the empowering and transforming effect of the politics of piety, which are conditioned partly upon silence-as-exit from politics, exist. For example, Azam Torab's (1996) investigation of *jalaseh* (prayer meetings) in Iran, similarly posit the appropriation and transcending of religious practices as a means of agency for women. In contrast to the women's mosque movement, *jalaseh* takes place in the home, with recitations of the Quran, debates of religious principles as well as social and political issues. Similarly, Marie Nathalie LeBlanc investigated the feminisation of Islamic authority in Côte d'Ivoire. Agency enacted within the bounds of religion in the pursuit of what is good was a significant development in the sub-Saharan context where in the past women's empowered agency was associated with acts of militancy. With the resurgence of faith, this shifted to acts of piety, and what LeBlanc (2014) terms the 'feminization of Islamic authority' – i.e. the predominance of women spreading, enacting and upholding the institutions of religion. The 'mastery of religious knowledge' (LeBlanc 2014, p.169) was, as in Egypt, a means of empowerment. Interestingly, the women of Côte d'Ivoire opted to transition into women-led religious NGOs, thus politicizing their agency by engaging with the public sphere. In this case, initial political silence enabled eventual logos.

This discussion, which posits silence-as-exit from politics as a positive expression of agency which entails within it the possibility of empowerment in the private realm, is not meant to present a falsely uniform picture of political silence as a solely positive phenomenon. Similarly, our positive rendering of the politics of piety as empowering should not be taken to mean that women in Muslim majority countries or societies uniformly regard it as such. Indeed, within the Middle East women have long argued that religion precludes emancipation which can only be achieved through the empowerment of all to participate in the political process. This view was exemplified Huda Sha'arawi's memoir, *Harem* (1986), where she argued that the treatment of women in pre-liberalisation Egypt was repressive, and conceptualised their lot as an instance of domination. More recently, Fatima Mernissi (1975) and Mona Eltahawy (2015) found the emergence of the movement towards piety a disturbing and counterproductive development for the pursuit of emancipation. Thus, they argued, that religion serves to silence and further bind women to patriarchy. Their accounts highlight that for those who do not accept the edicts of true faith, the politics of piety are not empowering. Instead, if they are experienced as an imposition, the politics of piety can lead to a violent silencing: a forceful removal from the public/political as the result of unacceptable domination. This ambiguity over the interpretation of silence within the specific context of the politics of piety allows us to highlight the difficulty inherent in engaging with such a multimodal phenomenon even within a single social or political milieu.

Conclusion

In this chapter we traced the identification of the phenomenon of silence in political theory with violent domination and its subsequent theorisation as such (or not at all) to the ontology of the unbound subject. For this subject, the only acceptable limits are self-chosen and choice is always expressed politically through voice. Therefore increasingly since the Enlightenment, the legitimacy of norms, laws and political arrangement, was conceptualised in logocentric terms. Silence, as a result, was theorised as antithetical or unimportant for politics. The second section of the chapter illustrated how this understanding is manifested in diverse works of feminist international political theory which either theorises political silences solely as violent exclusions or does not theorise them at all. The final section of the chapter focuses on the silences-as-exit from politics of Muslim women in the context of the politics of piety. Here we illustrate that the political silence of marginal-to-power subjects cannot be automatically/acontextually read as instances of unacceptable domination. Indeed, we show that some silences are expressions of agency which in turn entail the possibility of empowerment and may lead to the transformation of society from within. This, in turn, highlights the inability of the theories we explored in the second part of this chapter to provide an account of legitimacy which takes this into consideration. Indeed neither the sophisticated theory of Benhabib nor the context sensitive communicative ethics of Young can deal with the issues raised here.

The juxtaposition of theoretical analysis and of the practice of silence-as-exit by Muslim women, highlights two problems with the prevailing reading of silence as a phenomenon and as a theoretical concept in political theory in general and feminist political theory in particular. The first issue is interpretive and the second normative. Interpretively, the problem becomes apparent in the third part of the chapter which serves to illustrate that silence in political life in some cases is an instance of agency understood as such only when we take into consideration the context that gives specific in-

stances of agency their meaning. Doing so forces us to recognise that subjects may be driven to silence by desires, like the desire to please God, other than those that inhere in *our* understanding of the Good Life. Such profoundly different understandings of the good and the desires they give birth to are unthinkable (Freeden 2015; Young 1997) to those of us whose hermeneutical horizons were constituted as a result of the history of ideas briefly discussed in the first part of the chapter. This is of course something that Young and Spivak are keenly aware of. The most important issue we face in relation to the theorisation of silence is normative. Normatively, silence, specifically silence-as-exit from politics, creates an aporia for theorists who, even while rejecting the fiction of the unbound self, take deliberation as the only way to establish the legitimacy of a norm in a particular context. Silence-as-exit begs the question: how can legitimacy be established in light of the purposeful political silence of some political subjects? As importantly, how can we guard against mistaking violent exclusions for purposeful silences? Finally, is a legitimate political settlement even possible in light of these profound challenges? Listening for silence, therefore, illuminates the deep plurality of our world, the inherent difficulty in political judgement and the limitations of the predominant understanding of legitimacy which has so far prevented us from recognising and effectively dealing with this complex reality.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, L., 2013. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Ahmed, L., 2011. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Al-Ali, N.S., 2002. *The women's movement in Egypt, with selected reference to Turkey.* Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper Number 5, UNRISD, accessed 13 May 2018 <<http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/search/9969203536F64607C1256C08004BB140>>

Anderson, P., 2011. 'The Piety of the Gift' Selfhood and Sociality in the Egyptian Mosque Movement. *Anthropological Theory*, 11(1), pp.3-21.

Badran, M. and Cooke, M., 2004 *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing.* Second Edition. Indiana. Indiana University Press.

Benhabib, S., 1992. *Situating the self: Gender, community, and postmodernism in contemporary ethics.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

— 2002. *The claims of culture: Equality and diversity in the global era.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bucar, E.M., 2010. Dianomy: Understanding religious women's moral agency as creative conformity. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 78(3), pp.662-686.

Dhawan, N., 2007. *Impossible Speech: On the Politics of Silence and Violence.* Sankt Augustin.

Dingli, S., 2015. We need to talk about silence: Re-examining silence in International Relations theory. *European Journal of International Relations*, 21(4), pp.721-742.

El-Guindi, F., 1999. *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance.* Oxford: Berg.

Elshtain, J.B., 2008. *Sovereignty: God, State and Self.* New York: Basic Books.

Eltahawy, M., 2015. *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs A Sexual Revolution.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Enloe, C., 2000. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.* London: University of California Press.

— 2004. *The Curious Feminist.* London: University of California Press.

- Freeden, M., 2015. Silence in political theory: A conceptual predicament. *Journal of Political Ideology* 20(1), pp.1-9
- Geuss, R., 2008. *Philosophy and real politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gordts, E., 2013. Muslim women against FEMEN. *The Huffington Post*, 4 May, accessed 2 March 2013 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/05/muslim-women-against-femen_n_3023052.html>
- Hansen, L., 2000. The Little Mermaid's silent security dilemma and the absence of gender in the Copenhagen School. *Millennium* 29(2), pp.285–306.
- Hutchings, K., 2005. Speaking and hearing: Habermasian discourse ethics, feminism and IR. *Review of International Studies*, 31(1), pp.155-165.
- 2009. Good fathers and rebellious daughters: reading women in Benhabib's international political theory. *Journal of International Political Theory*, 5(2), pp.113-124.
- 2013. Choosers or losers? Feminist ethical and political agency in a plural and unequal world. In: Madhok, S., Phillips, A., Wilson, K., Hemmings, C., eds., *Gender, Agency, and Coercion*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 14-28.
- 2013. Universalism in feminist international ethics: gender and the difficult labour of translation. In: Browne, J. ed., *Dialogue, Politics and Gender*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, pp.81-106.
- Kirkpatrick, J., 2017. *The Virtues of Exit: On Resistance and Quitting Politics*. Chapel Hill: UNCP.
- Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C., 2014. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- LeBlanc, M.N., 2014. Piety, Moral Agency, and Leadership: Dynamics Around the Feminization of Islamic Authority in Côte d'Ivoire. *Islamic Africa*, 5(2), pp.167-198.
- Locke, J., 1980. *Of political or civil society. The Second Treatise of Government* [1690]. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Mahmood, S., 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- N/D. *Interview with Saba Mahmood*, accessed 5 April 2018 <<http://thelightinher-eyesmovie.com/resources/interview-saba-mahmood/>>
- Maggio, J., 2007. “Can the Subaltern Be Heard?”: Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. *Alternatives*, 32(4), pp.419-443.

- Mehta, U.S., 1999. *Liberalism and empire: A study in nineteenth-century British liberal thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mernissi, F., 2011. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Muslim Society*. London, Saqi.
- Mishra, P., 2017. *Age of anger: A history of the present*. London: Macmillan.
- Parpart, J., 2010. Choosing silence: Rethinking voice, agency and women's empowerment. In: Ryan-Flood, R. and Gill, R. eds., *Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections*. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 15–29.
- Rousseau, J.J., 2011. *The basic political writings*. Hackett Publishing.
- Shani, G., 2008. Toward a post-Western IR: The Umma, Khalsa Panth, and critical international relations theory. *International Studies Review*, 10(4), pp.722-734.
- Sharawi, H., 1986. *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist*. London. Virago Press.
- Spivak, G., 1998. Can The Subaltern Speak?, accessed 26 May 2011 <http://www.mal-dura.unipd.it/dllags/docentianglo/materiali_oboe_lm/2581_001.pdf>
- Torab, A., 1996. Piety as gendered agency: a study of jalaseh ritual discourse in an urban neighbourhood in Iran. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, pp.235-252.
- Watson, H., 1994. Women and the Veil. In: Ahmed, A.S. and Donnan, H. eds., *Islam, globalization, and postmodernity*. London: Routledge, pp.141-59.
- Young, I.M., 1997. Asymmetrical reciprocity: On moral respect, wonder, and enlarged thought. *Constellations*, 3, pp.340-363.