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Christine Delphy, *Separate and Dominate: Feminism and Racism after the War on Terror*, Verso, 2015, 192 pp., \$23.95 US (pbk), ISBN: 9781781688809.

Christine Delphy's *Separate and Dominate* is both provocative and sensible, a bracing contribution to the literature on feminism, race, and Islam. Originally published in French in 2008, and ably translated by David Broder, *Separate and Dominate* collects ten essays, ranging from five to thirty-five pages, originally published between 1996 and 2006. Some appear here in modified form. Though twenty years have elapsed since the first was written, and though some focus on French political controversies, naming unfamiliar politicians and addressing obscure legislation, Delphy's central concerns are strikingly relevant to contemporary English-reading audiences. Her sharp analyses serve as a corrective to widespread, unproductive ways of thinking about migration, racism, imperialism, and war.

Delphy is a French feminist who rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s alongside Simone de Beauvoir. Her theoretical bent is evident in the opening essay, "Who's Behind the 'Others?'," the only one written specifically for this collection. She aims "to elaborate a materialist approach to not only oppression and marginalization, but also domination and normality" (1). Insisting on categorization as an othering act—the volume's original French subtitle was "Who Are the Others?"—she explores the way that "division is constructed at the same time as hierarchy." Such "dichotomous and comprehensive" social divisions ("If you are not in one group you are in the other") apply to men and women, to white/non-white, and heterosexual/homosexual. Rather than advocate "accept[ing] the Other" (1) she argues for understanding "the operations that give priority to one group and stigmatize another" (3). Othering, for her, is not an ahistorical facet of human psychology but the result of "concrete material practices, including ideological and discursive ones" (3).

The book is concerned with oppression of "women, homosexuals, and non-whites," though Delphy notes that "the only oppression on which [she has] worked in detail is the oppression of women" (13). What interests her—and will interest readers—is "the master group, the group of Ones" (as opposed to Others) and how their dominance operates, including ideologically: in contrast to the "psychic suffering among the oppressed [which] the dominant cannot even begin to imagine," she observes, "the characteristics of the dominant are not seen as specific characteristics, but as the way to be...normal" (19, ellipsis in original). She has a way with the pithy phrase: "Indeed, this is the classic form of discrimination, having to 'deserve' what others are entitled to" (44).

Women's oppression is central to the essay that affirms affirmative action, rather than a static demand for formal parity, as the preferred path toward (gender) equality. Delphy

insists that aiming for parity is wrongheaded precisely because of how domination works. “[W]omen cannot,” she writes, “be equal to what men are today, because ‘what men are today’ presupposes the subordination of women” (48). She will have no truck with acting “as if” things were equal, since “to act as if [society] were equal, when it isn’t, is to perpetuate inequality. It means putting people who don’t have the same resources on the same starting blocks, and then pretending to be surprised when they don’t arrive at the finish line together” (49). Though this essay largely leaves race aside, the parallels between sexist and racist discrimination are clear. Delphy’s analysis is instructive for Americans since in the US discussion about affirmative action revolves largely around race; white American women collectively have benefitted most from affirmative action and yet have been among its most vocal critics.

Many of Delphy’s insights reiterate points made by feminists of color. Whiteness—especially in the United States—is constructed in opposition to blackness. (Not unrelated, as Toni Morrison points out in *Playing in the Dark*,¹ some people’s lack of freedom becomes a necessary condition to thinking about freedom itself.) Delphy breaks no new theoretical ground when she points out that the typical non-white is imagined as male while the typical woman is assumed to be white. Still, it matters that a white (“like it or not” [34]) woman continually point it out, particularly to her largely secular, white, feminist audience.

Delphy discusses parallels between the operations of racism and of sexism, while noting that this discussion can erase women of color, whose identities fall at the intersection. She is at her most interesting, and most relevant for those who study Muslims, in her focus on the centrality of racism to French feminist identity. The racism she identifies includes the construction of Muslim Otherness as backward, patriarchal, and oppressive. She illustrates, using examples including the headscarf controversy, the ways that imperialist racism allows one to pretend that sexism has been eradicated in the French context when that is patently not the case. Her motive is the “shameful way” in which “the ‘women’s cause’ has been instrumentalized...by the imperial war (‘the war on terror’) that is currently underway” (35).

Delphy unremittably critiques this American-led war, in which “The state of states, the United States, today demands no less than a monopoly on legitimate international violence” (68). Chapter 5, “Guantanamo and the Destruction of the Law,” highlights the suspension of basic rights that its persistence requires: the US exists above the law, and the rest of the world is silently complicit. “A War for Afghan Women?” (Chapter 6) connects the dots between the war on terror, sexism, and racism. Afghan women’s suffering is cynically manipulated to justify military intervention in Afghanistan: “The irresponsible way in which the alibi ‘the liberation of Afghan women’ is used in the West is an illustration of the fact that Western lives are worth more, infinitely more, than others; as well as the fact that the West, not content with placing a very low price on these other lives, also thinks it has the right to dispose of them at will” (91). Delphy connects contemporary freedom rhetoric to past colonial interventions: “Today’s ‘duty to intervene’, yesterday’s ‘civilizing mission’” (95).

In the years since Delphy wrote these essays, scholars including Deepa Kumar (*Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*²) and Lila Abu-Lughod (*Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*³) have explored these points in more depth. Delphy’s noteworthy contribution is to insistently connect geopolitical issues to constructions of feminist identity and French identity, through

¹ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

² Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

³ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

processes of exclusion and projects of “tolerance,” which she terms “the opposite of acceptance” (121). Domination relies on classification and separation; “Race, Caste, and Gender in France” (Chapter 8) are increasingly intertwined with the “global project: the ‘war on terror.’” Delphy’s uncompromising critique of her feminist countrywomen’s complicity with imperial war and national(ist) racism grows not only out of anti-imperialist, anti-racist commitments but, even more fundamentally, out of the belief that this complicity is antithetical to the feminist project she cherishes. As to that project, one final and useful point: profound cleavages exist even among those who agree on certain ideals, such as female equality. Some cite the official rule—formal equality—and deplore the regrettable fact that it is not always upheld. Others insist on discussing “the real rule,” the way things are in practice. This split causes tremendous trouble for the first group, since the official rule demands that everyone pretend not to know that the real rule exists. Whether one insists on pointing out that the real rule exists has implications for tactics and for alliances in the collective struggle against sexism, racism, and the unequally distributed consequences of our newest never-ending war.

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