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Beauvoir and Lorde confront the honorary man trope: Toward a feminist theory of political resistance

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ABSTRACT

Feminist historians of political resistance have drawn attention to the 'honorary man' tradition—the belief women resisters must overcome their feminine bodies and act like their male counterparts to be taken seriously in resistance movements. Yet they have not fully explored the resources of feminist theory to counter it. Building a bridge between history and theory, we address this gap by turning to the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Audre Lorde. We highlight their shared understanding that resistance is embodied and situated in social contexts shot through by oppressive gender, race, and class norms. We sketch out a view of feminist resistance that reveals that women resisters have novel possibilities for action, confront gendered vulnerabilities, and encounter difficult dilemmas that have no easy answers. Our paper deepens our understanding of the failures of the honorary man tradition, and it offers conceptual tools for scholars and activists to think beyond it.

Introduction

On November 7, 1943, Lucie Aubrac's status in the French Resistance changed. Aubrac just completed a daring, successful mission that made clever use of her body and would bring her fame within the French resistance movement. Visibly pregnant, Aubrac requested to "marry" the father of her unborn child, a member of the French Resistance slated for execution by the Gestapo. After the fictional marriage, Aubrac's team struck, rescuing over a dozen prisoners, as well as killing several guards. Later in the safe house, Aubrac's changed status became clear. Favier, her host, asked the women to help Aubrac's three-year-old son. Aubrac stood to help. He said, "Not you! I was speaking to my women. You are a man you know. You fight like a man. You stay with us" (Aubrac, 1994, 195).

In this moment Aubrac became what feminist historians have called an "honorary man." Feminist historians show this sexist trope or device has customarily been reserved for women resisters who demonstrated exceptional courage, tenacity, and prowess, the so-called virile qualities (Andrieu, 2000, 18–19; Schwartz, 1989, 138; Yates, Gqola, & Ramphela, 1998, 91). They have established that women were recognized as true or real resisters if they acted like men and freed themselves from the limitations ordinarily associated with their female embodiment and gender roles. Feminist historians rightly challenged this sexist trope and

criticized commentators and scholars who deployed it.

The honorary man trope's nullification of women's bodies is incongruous with many women's experiences in resistance movements. Aubrac's daring rescue was successful in part *because* of her body: she duped the Gestapo by leveraging her pregnant body to advantage the French Resistance. In her memoir, Aubrac considered her specific embodiment as a woman not as "a sign of weakness," but as "evidence" of her "capacity to operate as a Resister in difficult conditions" (Gorrara, 1995, 150; Aubrac, 1994). She commented on the absurdity of being called an honorary man: "I look down at my stomach, thinking back to all my ploys with the Gestapo, the same old story of my illegal pregnancy. Is there anything masculine about that?" (Aubrac, 1994, 195). In contrast to the honorary man idea, Aubrac sees her body and her identity as a woman as central to her successes and experiences in the French Resistance (Aubrac, 1994, 195).

We build on the pathbreaking scholarship of feminist historians who have illuminated the gendered logic of the honorary man trope and persuasively identified its deficiencies and internal contradictions (Andrieu, 2000; Roy, 2007; Schwartz, 1989; Yates & Gqola, 1998). Our analysis of the honorary man theme is a step in the process, not the destination. Rather, this paper's terminus is to re-imagine resistance by focusing on women's embodied experiences (Andrieu, 2000, 17; Schwartz, 1987, 141–153). We use an interpretive approach to build a

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bridge between history and theory. We counterpose a masculinist myth about women's resistance against women's ambiguous, embodied experiences of resistance, as illuminated by Simone de Beauvoir and Audre Lorde.

Focusing on Beauvoir and Lorde's relevant texts, we argue that centering resistance on women's bodies illuminates three eye-opening insights obscured by the honorary man trope. These key insights are, first, that women resisters possess fresh possibilities and innovative tools for action. These novel tools for resistance have been neglected before. Second, centering on women resisters reveals that they confront gendered vulnerabilities that, again, are largely erased by the honorary man trope. Their embodied vulnerabilities are thrown into high relief. Third and finally, when looked at through the lens of embodiment, women face numerous dilemmas hidden by the honorary man framework. These dilemmas are challenging and yield no easy answers.

We illuminate these three insights to deepen a feminist understanding of the honorary man trope's sexist presumptions and failures, and to aid feminist scholars and activists in thinking and acting outside of it. We contribute to the existing efforts in political theory to think resistance beyond the troubling presumptions of heroic sovereignty and virtuous commitment (Anker, 2014; Leebaw, 2019; Mihai, 2019, 2020). We also contribute to the scholarship in feminist theory that has drawn attention to the emancipatory powers of embodied agency (Butler, 2021; Marso, 2017; Maxwell, 2020). Our distinct contribution lies in outlining how acknowledgment of embodied agency can deepen our understanding of women's resistance activity in concrete instances and situations of resistance struggles.

While many canonical feminist theorists offer valuable resources for re-imagining political resistance, we turn to Beauvoir and Lorde because of their careful and consistent focus on women's bodies in resistance movements. Beauvoir and Lorde write in different political contexts and times, and the resistance movements they examine – primarily Algerian resistance and United States' liberation movements – are distinct in crucial respects. It is unsurprising that, as we show, Lorde and Beauvoir part ways on a central dilemma women resisters confront. At the same time, much unites these theorists. Beauvoir and Lorde share steadfast attention to women, not as titular men, or helpers, but rather as crucial political actors within resistance movements. Moreover, both Lorde and Beauvoir are attuned to women as embodied beings and thus they theorize from the vantage point of the lived experiences of women resisters, especially as these experiences relate to gender, race and ethnicity, class, and sexuality. In short, Beauvoir and Lorde turn the honorary man theme upside down. They focus on women in resistance, not men, and they center on women as gendered and embodied, rather than negating or denying these aspects of identity. Therefore, Lorde and Beauvoir are well suited to confront the honorary man theme and reveal what it hides.

Before proceeding with the argument, two caveats are necessary. First, by 'resistance' we mean individual and collective struggles against systemic oppression that strive for greater freedom and equality. We challenge the narrow understanding of resistance that associates "true" resistance with armed combat, as the honorary man framework does. Rather, we understand resistance takes different forms: from open and direct forms of opposition to everyday, covert acts of defiance that Scott calls "the weapons of the weak"; from active participation in armed struggle to organizing, support and care work that no resistance movement can do without.¹ We also believe resistance occurs in a wide range of contexts. Though the anti-colonial struggle that Beauvoir confronted differs from the systemic anti-Black violence Lorde addressed, we see both as resistance. This range of political contexts expands our analysis

¹ We take "care as resistance" to mean opposition that takes the form of caring for others who are also engaged in resistance, armed opposition, or who are persecuted by the authorities. Our term builds on care ethics scholarship (Engster, 2007; Tronto, 1996).

and clarifies key themes and ideas.

Second, we are focused on gender, examining how a particularly gendered imaginary shapes a dominant vision of resistance. But we believe this gendered imaginary works against the backdrop of – and is sustained by – intersectional dynamics of oppression and identity, including race, class, ethnicity, and age. Therefore, our project includes challenging oppressive understandings of racial, classed, and sexual embodiment within resistance movements.

Our argument proceeds by examining the existing feminist literature on the honorary man trope and paying close attention to the work of several influential feminist historians. With this scholarly foundation in place, we turn attention to our canonical feminist theory resources, first Beauvoir and then Lorde, to gain an understanding of what a feminist re-imagining of resistance would look like. Though we highlight the distinctions between Lorde and Beauvoir, these theory sections focus on the three key insights we find in their embodied, feminist approaches: novel possibilities for action, gendered vulnerabilities, and challenging dilemmas. In conclusion, we return to Aubrac's experience and, referencing the main insights of Beauvoir and Lorde, we sketch how an embodied, feminist approach alters our understanding of women like Aubrac and political resistance more generally.

The honorary man trope neutralizes feminine bodies

Before turning to Beauvoir and Lorde, it is essential to understand the feminist scholarship on the honorary man approach. This scholarship provides a broader understanding of the Aubrac anecdote, especially being called a man after returning from a successful, violent mission. Historical scholarship suggests this episode was neither singular nor strange. The idea that some resistant women can temporarily earn the title of being a man is a theme that commentators and scholars have repeated across movements. For our purposes, understanding the honorary man framework is essential because it contrasts with how Lorde and Beauvoir understand political resistance.

Paula Schwartz identifies the honorary man trope in her path-breaking analysis of women's role in the French Resistance of the Second World War. Schwartz argues that, though women's roles and gender were complex and fluid during the Resistance, this complexity was reduced to sexist tropes and themes. According to Schwartz, one such trope was the tendency to depict women resisters as playing a crucial role in the Resistance when they acted like men (Schwartz, 1989, 127). The honorary man idea highlighted the contributions of exceptional women, such as Bertie Albrecht, Lucie Aubrac, Marie-Madeline Forcade who commanded networks, used violence, or made life-or-death decisions (Schwartz, 1989, 127).

Schwartz argues that some women involved in armed struggle pushed against (and partially reified) a long-standing association between men and combat. Post-war commentators thought men alone are engaged in combat. Fighting was a masculine domain. However, "gun toting" *partisanes* challenged this conventional view that combat was a male preserve, and in the early days of the Resistance these women "pushed the gender barrier to its outermost limit by engaging in combat in both conventional and unconventional ways" (Schwartz, 1989, 151). They engaged in armed battle, fought alongside men, or commanded men in armed struggles (Schwartz, 1989, 128).

In these cases, Schwartz observes, the gender of the person did not alter the understanding that resistance was masculine. The association between fighting and masculinity remained fixed, so much so that fighting redefined a woman as a temporary or titular man (Schwartz, 1989, 136–137). Remaining steadfast in their understanding that resistance was masculine, some divested violent women of their femininity. Some of *partisanes* understood their role in a similar way. One observed, "I am a man... If I smoke and drink today, it's because I picked it up in the Resistance. I worked side by side with men so I had to be like them, too" (Schwartz, 1989, 138). Gender altered, not the masculinization of resistance.

Claire Andrieu perceives a similar trope of masculinizing women, especially in post-war commentaries about the French Resistance. Andrieu notes that commentators generally did not draw the gender line between men and women, but between "men and 'male women' on one side, and 'pure women' on the other" (Andrieu, 2000, 24). Women could become men, but the inverse was false (men did not become women through resistance). This asymmetric logic explains how, for instance, Annie Guéhenno, could state that she and her fellow comrades in the Resistance were venturing into "our man's life" (Andrieu, 2000, 24).

In contrast, to the stereotype of young, single women entering the Resistance, statistical evidence suggests that age or marital status was not correlated with a commitment to the Resistance (Andrieu, 2000, 20). Resisters were married and had children. The expectation, however, was that women should overcome their maternal feelings. This "personal trial, if overcome" Andrieu notes, "made her stronger and more passionate than men" (Andrieu, 2000, 20). Following the honorable man trope, the female, maternal body was conquered or neutralized for women resisters.

The honorary man framework skewed understandings of women's resistance in the French resistance in another way: women resisters who did not fit the honorary man norm tended to be forgotten, and their resistance was erased. Because resistance was equated with (masculine) armed combat, women's actions not closely tied to armed combat were not identified as resistance. Thus, women who sheltered and fed resisters, cared for escaped prisoners, aided downed Allied aviators, or hid and looked after Jews on the run, were not seen as engaged in resistance (Andrieu, 2000, 17). Equating resistance with combat tended to exclude less dramatic, open, or everyday forms of resistance, in other words. It led to disregarding "weapons of the weak," James Scott's term for covert forms of opposition like foot-dragging, exit, evasion, false compliance, and pilfering (Scott, 1985, 1989). Building on Andrieu's observation about unaccounted women's resistance, however, we add another everyday resistance that even Scott overlooks: "care as resistance."

A narrow, masculine concept of resistance partially explains why only 2 % of books published on the French Resistance from 1944 to 1995 focused on female resisters (Andrieu, 2000, 15). It also accounts for the consensus belief that women constituted about 12 % of resisters, a percentage that does not include women's "care as resistance" which was seen as socially normalized or naturalized because of their gender (Andrieu, 2000, 19–20). Along with Schwartz, Andrieu calls for a redefinition of resistance, one that accounts for women's experiences. Understanding that Resistance was an army of shadows, she observes that the story "of the shadows, of the shadows, the housewives" remains to be told (Andrieu, 2000, 17; Schwartz, 1987, 141–153).²

Srila Roy finds a similar emphasis on heroic, masculine resistance in the late 1960s radical left Naxalbari movement of Bengal, albeit with some crucial differences (Roy, 2007). Women were generally excluded from violent resistance in the Naxalbari movement. The Communist Party and male ideologues limited women to subsidiary work, off-loading tasks that were marginal, technical, or deemed too tedious for men (Roy, 2007, 191). The Naxalbari movement was not a feminist movement and, in the realm of sexual politics, it tended toward a leftist form of traditionalism that contained and limited women activism vis-à-vis childbirth, marriage, and a gendered division of labor (Roy, 2007, 189; Andrieu, 2000, 16–17). Reinscribing the public-private divide

within the movement, resistant men contained women's agency.

Denied the opportunity to elevate their standing within the movement using violence, women in the Naxalbari movement found they could prove themselves by getting arrested, being incarcerated, or enduring torture. As one women resister put it, "nobody took me seriously until I got arrested" (Roy, 2007, 191). This statement draws attention "to a politics of memory that commemorates women only as victims of state-inflicted violence, erasing all other modes of subjectivity" (Roy, 2007, 192). Women were remembered as "real" resisters, in other words, when they *received* violence from the state. Other forms of women's resistance, however, were negated. The line Andrieu observes between men and 'male women,' on one hand, and pure women, on the other, was marked by violence here too. But men and 'male women' underwent violence from the state on behalf of the movement, while pure women in the Naxalbari movement had no contact with violence. Pure women neither wielded violence against the state nor received it from the state.

The Naxalbari movement reduced female subjectivity to the body. Women resisters were often seen as feminine bodies, nothing more. In addition, men and women in the movement understood the female body as a problem that must be overcome to participate in the political realm. For instance, women were excluded from the countryside, the primary focus of Naxalbari resistance and the main area of political struggle, because of their biological differences: women had "natural" needs, such as a toilet or a bed, that could not be supplied in rural areas. By the mid 1970s, the Party actively discouraged women from joining because it could not keep them safe by providing the physical protection that they required (Roy, 2007, 194). As Roy puts it, "the female body is discursively construed as the locus of biological differences and thus as an impediment for true revolutionary activism" (Roy, 2007, 194). Being a mother, for instance, was not consistent with true political resistance. Thus, the Party treated pregnancy as a crime and maintained that maternal feelings were "counterrevolutionary" (Roy, 2007, 197).

At the same time, the Party celebrated women who left their children or lost them to the revolutionary cause. These women embodied what Roy calls a "heroic sacrificial femininity" (Roy, 2007, 197). By choosing to negate maternal feelings and deny any kind of vulnerability, they transformed personal struggles into a heroic willingness to sacrifice for the cause. As Roy puts it, "the self is written as heroic" (Roy, 2007, 200). Here again, women who were touched by violence by the loss of a child, for instance, fit the repertoire of revolutionary heroism and self-sacrifice.

Mamphela Ramphele reveals another way that women have been elevated in the honorary man idea: political widowhood. Reflecting on her activism within the anti-apartheid Black Consciousness Movement (BC) in South Africa, Ramphele recognizes the "honorary male status" was a reality in the BC Movement (Yates & Gqola, 1998, 91). One example is political widowhood, which elevates women who are intimately connected with a prominent activist who has died or been incarcerated during the struggle. Political widows are "the ultimate honorary man" (Ramphele, 1996, 105). Political widows have political agency but, as Ramphele observes, they are constrained by living out the legacy of their spouse or partner. The political widow's relationships are dictated by the man she is symbolically replacing: her spouse. His friends and enemies become hers.

Although the honorary man trope is varied and complex, there are a few common themes that connect its distinctive historical iterations. The honorary man trope focuses on a heroic, masculine form of resistance that naturalizes and normalizes men as agents of resistance, especially violent resistance. This masculine norm is supported, in part, by the presence of non-normative feminine bodies that are understood to be naturally weak, maternal, or in need of protection and thus not inherently suited for the highly valued work of resistance. There are, then, true freedom fighters (men) and those who assist the struggle in ways that are cast as marginal or non-essential (women). Women are excluded or cast as not proper resisters because of their bodies. To be a woman,

² The erasure of women's resistance experience was not the only erasure that plagues the French Resistance. Black soldiers who joined the French struggle against Nazism during WWII were treated as secondary soldiers and were subject to racial oppression. Frantz Fanon relates how he joined the Free French troops convinced that he was defending the universal human ideals of freedom, equality, and solidarity, but experienced a profound betrayal. The demeaning and derogatory treatment he experienced as a Black man made him realize that, to the French, he was only an object, rather than a human being (Mbembe, 2013, 8).

then, is to not be a resister.

This binary, gendered relationship can be transgressed, however. Through heroic or sacrificial actions, some women can overcome the problem of their bodies and become 'real' resisters and titular men. The methods to accomplish this move are varied; passing the bar between pure women and male women means different things in different contexts. Still, a persistent theme is the temporary negation or the ability to overcome the limitations of the female body. Women cease to be women provisionally because, for instance, they show that they can use violence effectively or that they can suffer violence in the name of the cause. Though their feminine bodies still have a physical presence – Aubrac was pregnant before and after becoming an honorary man – they are neutralized in the resistance movement. To enter the masculine realm of resistance with some equivalence of standing, status, and recognition as men, women are ostensibly made men or 'male women.'

Beauvoir: embodiment as an inevitable condition of resistance

Observing how the honorary man trope neutralizes women's bodies is helpful because we can see how distinct Beauvoir's approach to resistance is, especially as it relates to women in resistance. For Beauvoir, resistance happens through and within the body. Thus, resisters do not need to overcome or transcend their bodies to engage in 'proper' or 'real' resistance. Indeed, for Beauvoir, resistance must stay grounded in the condition of embodiment and operate fully and completely in the space and presence of bodies. Embodiment is an inescapable condition of resistance, in other words. This one change – embodiment as a necessary condition of resistance – may seem small. But, as we will see, it has significant implications, especially in terms of exposing the moral dilemmas posed for women resisters.

Beauvoir's embodied possibilities

Beauvoir's idea of embodied resistance can be understood through her writings about the Algerian War and Djamilia Boupacha, a young female Algerian militant accused of terrorist activities against the French state. Beauvoir's awakening to the realities of the Algerian war occurred by paying attention to bodies: first, to the bodies of tortured Algerians, and, second, to her own embodied context. Beauvoir's attention to torture shatters her habitual way of being in the world. Her "encounter" with the perspective of the tortured Algerians – "the broken bones, the burns on the face, on the genitals, the torn-out nails" – decentres her sense of self as a Frenchwoman and radically changes her relationship with her fellow citizens (Beauvoir, 1965, 367). As she writes: "I could no longer bear my fellow citizens [...] I wanted to stop being an accomplice in this war, but how?" (Beauvoir, 1965, 369).

In considering how to act, Beauvoir shifts focus to her body, her positionality. Beginning with her own embodied circumstance and conditions, she asks what she can do given the possibilities of her situation and surroundings. For Beauvoir, this process means acknowledging and leveraging her status as a French intellectual. While Beauvoir supported the clandestine network supporting the Algerian independence struggle within France, she also made clear that she was not well suited to this work herself. As she put it, to be a part of the secret network "demanded total commitment, and it would have been cheating to pretend that I was capable of such a thing. I am not a woman of action; my reason for living is writing [...]" (Beauvoir, 1965, 460–61). Thus, Beauvoir fought against the injustice of French colonialism as a well-known public intellectual rather than an underground activist. She sought to shift the French public opinion in support of the Algerian independence and alter the colonial encounter. Her resistance did not come without cost. Her community saw her as a "traitor" and she

received death threats (Kruks, 2005, 189).³

Some Algerian women who joined the Algerian independence movement, like Zohra Drif, Djamilia Bouhired, Louise Ighilahriz or Malika Ighilahriz, provide a contrasting example of using their embodied situation and context to their advantage. These resisters exploited the oppressive colonial stereotypes about the Algerian women as passive, obedient, and non-political. Using these stereotypes to their advantage, they infiltrated the French settler communities of Algeria, and sometimes shifted between gender roles. Mildred Mortimer describes these shifting dynamics in her contribution to this special issue. Her article relates how Malika Ighilahriz, after being supplied by the FLN with false identity papers and a high-end car, successfully crossed the checkpoint dressed as a European woman. Once in the Casbah, however, she adopted the look of a veiled, Algerian woman, finding this identity better to courier messages or weapons (Amrane-Minne, 1997, 149).

These actions were different from and like Beauvoir's. The Algerian resisters risked violent struggle, imprisonment, rape, torture, and death; for them, the stakes were significantly higher than for Beauvoir. In another way, however, these women were like Beauvoir because they too creatively leveraged existing (oppressive) understandings of Muslim women and their embodiment to the advantage of the movement. They, too, answered the political question 'what is to be done?' by beginning with their reified bodies. Discerning the various cultural significances of their bodies in their historical context, they interrogated the multiple cultural meanings attached to their bodies and how these gender norms could be leveraged to benefit the cause.

This leveraging of the oppressive gender norms to benefit the cause of the resistance is not limited to the case of the Algerian liberation struggle but can be observed in contemporary contexts. As Sherine Hafez discusses in her article, women participating in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution creatively used the existing understandings of women's body to their advantage. Their dress and bodily comportment often complied with the appropriate forms of femininity, piety, and authenticity. These actions allowed them to frame their revolutionary effort in line with patriarchal values (such as honor), while subverting the patriarchal logic of state power (see Hafez in this special issue).

The crucial point is, for Beauvoir, resistance should depend on the possibilities of our situated being – that is, on whom we have become throughout our lives and on our history, on our values, and on our existing encounters (Kruks, 2005, 191). Women acting in caring and supporting roles, for instance, by offering food and support to others in the movement or sheltering the persecuted are engaging in legitimate resistance. Housewives can be freedom fighters *qua* housewives. Beauvoir's focus on embodiment illuminates that these activists leverage their context-specific, embodied circumstance – and the skills they developed – to further the cause of freedom. Her concept of resistance lacks the pre-determined, normative cast of the honorary man trope; it is not fixed with masculinity or with using violence. Rather, Beauvoir posits resistance should look distinct depending on embodiment and context, and thus opens novel possibilities for resistance beyond the limitations of the honorary man trope.

Beauvoir's limitations of embodiment

In addition to illuminating new possibilities for resistance, Beauvoirian embodiment also elucidates risks. Beginning with the body, as Beauvoir does, means apprehending the physical peril of concrete bodies in specific contexts. Just as women resisters face different embodied possibilities, they face different, gender-specific threats and dangers. At the very least, as Zohra Drif relates in her memoir of the struggle, women resisters often had to disobey their families, who believed that women's

³ French right-wing extremists made assassination attempts against prominent members of the French left, including Sartre (Marso, 2017, 95).

involvement in the struggle disrespected women's traditional roles (Drif, 2017, 81–83, 86). At worst, women resisters' sexual vulnerabilities could expose them to forms of violence and torture that other activists may not have to face.

Beauvoir addresses embodied risks that women resisters face in her analysis of Boupacha, who was raped and tortured by the French Army. In her defence of Boupacha, Beauvoir challenges the tendency of revolutionary thinkers, such as Frantz Fanon in *Algeria Unveiled*, to obscure the distinct and ambiguous position of women resisters within the “fraternity” of the liberation struggle (McClintock, 1999, 291). Instead of obscuring Boupacha's vulnerability within a universal “fraternity,” Beauvoir emphasizes how the French army's technique of torture – rape with a bottle – exploited Boupacha's gender-specific vulnerabilities. Moreover, this particular act of torture also drew its power from the rigid norms regulating women's sexuality within a Muslim culture (Beauvoir, 2012).

Paying attention to the contextualized, gender specific character of Boupacha's torture allows Beauvoir to highlight related aspects of her bravery. Violated and terrorized, Boupacha still managed to say: “I was tortured. I insist on being seen by a doctor” (Beauvoir, 2012, 274). Beauvoir illuminates how Boupacha affirmed her dignity and moved “beyond shame to agency” (Marso, 2017, 105). So doing, Beauvoir reveals new-found aspects of Boupacha's valour, which would be obscured without an embodied, context-specific, and gendered analysis.

Beauvoir, here, contrasts sharply with the honorary man theme and its simplistic view of women's participation. Rather than seeing sexual violence as a source of national shame or discouraging women from speaking out about their experiences, Beauvoir centers the particularism of the feminine body. Through her analysis of Boupacha's embodied agency, in other words, we can see how Beauvoir remains attentive to the manifest challenges confronting women in resistance movements as women. Her embodied approach opens up a discursive space in which resisters can give voice to their experience of sexual abuse and break the silence imposed upon them by the norms of the liberation struggle and of the broader society (Mortimer, 2012, 108). Moreover, Beauvoir's corporeal approach allows for a fresh appreciation of women's novel acts of nerve and bravery in confronting the risks of resistance.

Beauvoir's antinomies of resistance

Part of being embodied for Beauvoir means that we are born into a world that is not of our making. Our bodies are assigned cultural and social meanings that no individual can control or contain. This point is crucial for Beauvoir because it implies freedom *and* unfreedom in resistance movements. Rather than seeing resistance as a result of individuals' freedom to detach themselves from the surrounding world, Beauvoir presents a complex, layered view: the potential freedom of resistance intermingles with the unfreedom of oppressive aspects of identities and situated beings. While women resisters can leverage some aspects of their identities to further resistance, other aspects of their ascribed identities or meanings attached to their bodies may significantly constrain their freedom of resistant action and confront them with tragic dilemmas that have no easy answers.

Beginning with bodies in a world that is not of our choosing, Beauvoir's framework dispenses with an unshakable sense of moral clarity. Because women resisters operate in an unequal context, it is unlikely that they will be able to follow, in all circumstances, the Kantian imperative to always treat others as ends rather than means (Beauvoir, 2004, 138). Instead, they may be compelled to use others as instruments, risk reinforcing oppressive gender norms, or fail to bring about the desired ends of resistance. Moving toward freedom may entail moving toward unfreedom too. Resistance may imply complicity.

Beauvoir sheds light on such moral dilemmas in her public support of Boupacha. For instance, Beauvoir took care in how she presented Boupacha to the French public, judiciously appealing to some gendered norms and not to others. Beauvoir did not represent Boupacha to her

French audience as a veiled “oriental” woman and a revolutionary (Kruks, 2005, 193–94). Rather, she represented Boupacha as a young modern Algerian woman, a virgin, and a victim of sexual violence. Thereby, she sought to appeal to the sympathies of the French public and arouse public empathy for Boupacha's suffering. In this sense, Beauvoir used Boupacha's hardship to stir the French public out of complacency and further a broader political agenda (Kruks, 2005, 192–93). This tactical move also entailed an injustice. Beauvoir reproduced gender norms about women as vulnerable, passive subjects of violence rather than active, engaged resisters.

Further, Beauvoir experienced a clash when the FLN forced Boupacha to return to Algeria against her wishes. Beauvoir feared that speaking out on behalf of Boupacha might delegitimize the Algerian anti-colonial struggle and play into the hands of the right-wing parties in France (Kruks, 2012, 119–20). In this case, she believed she should side with the overall goal of the liberation movement instead of the well-being of a particular individual (Kruks, 2012, 119–20).

It is crucial to note that Beauvoir positions her moral dilemma as a clash, a framing that Lorde's work challenges and Beauvoir would question later in her life. As Beauvoir presents it at this juncture, however, she could either side with the FLN or Boupacha, not both. For Beauvoir, the conflict is zero sum: whatever was to be gained by the FLN would be lost by Boupacha and, more broadly by Algerian women. Her resolution of this dilemma was consequential. Beauvoir's decision not to intervene on behalf of Boupacha against the FLN failed to challenge the oppressive gender practices within the liberation movement. She chose one group's freedom (FLN) at the expense of another group (women). Looked at in terms of Boupacha as an individual, Beauvoir sacrificed one aspect of Boupacha's identity in favor of another. Freedom was bound up with unfreedom. It is important to note that Beauvoir later acknowledged the failures of women's emancipation in Algeria (Beauvoir in Moorehead, 1974). Even while fighting for freedom, resisters may end up reproducing unjust relationships and patterns of oppression. They can “too easily” reopen the “wounds,” scars, and pathologies of systemic violence (Marso, 2017, 119).

Crucially, Beauvoir's notion of embodied resistance accepts that uncertainty, risk, and the possibility of failure constitute inescapable aspects of resistant action. As we can see from Beauvoir's decision to side with the FLN, it is not easy to choose between competing values and decide how to act for others in the first place. Resisters' embeddedness in oppressive gender norms and unequal contexts means that what they do will always have multiple, unpredictable, and potentially harmful consequences. Yet Beauvoir's appeal to accept the limitations of embodied resistance is motivating as well. This is because it brings to light the dilemmas that have been silenced in the honorary man trope and recognizes the need to face up to them—rather than simply pretending they do not exist.

As we have seen, Beauvoir understands that resistance should be embodied and situated. In contrast to the honorary man tradition trope which neutralizes feminine bodies, Beauvoir's resistance embraces the physicality of women's bodies. Moreover, for Beauvoir, women's bodies are always embedded in complex social contexts and laden with multiple, even conflicting political meanings all of which can be leveraged for freedom. Yet they can also significantly constrain women resisters' field of possibilities and entail tragic choices, where all courses of action will be unjust in some way. Centering on women's bodies, as Beauvoir does, exposes facets of resistance occluded by the honorable man idea. Not all these Beauvoirian facets are beautiful or appealing; some are disturbing, unjust, and tragic.

Lorde: vulnerability as a source of resistance

Lorde shares Beauvoir's belief that political resistance must begin with situated bodies that are raced, gendered, sexualized, and classed in specific and nuanced ways. Both scholars, in other words, oppose the honorary man theme's neutralization of women's bodies. As we will see,

Lorde also shares Beauvoir's understanding of the tragedy and incompleteness of resistance movements. She sees that movements in the name of freedom can also smuggle in inherited tools of oppression.

While Lorde shares these theoretical commitments with Beauvoir, she takes these insights in a radically different direction. For Lorde, the tragedy of embodied resistance – that is, the possibility of replicating injustices within resistance movements – serves as an opportunity for freedom. The intermingling of freedom and unfreedom, in Lorde's hands, becomes a mechanism to achieve a better, more just present within resistance movements.

Lorde's novel possibilities

A good way to understand Lorde's more hopeful vision is to begin with her narration of her cancer diagnosis and its intriguing connection for her with political activism. As with Beauvoir, Lorde begins with her body. But Lorde focuses on a time when her body was defenseless and diseased, a crucial point. She uses her medical diagnosis to illuminate women's bodily vulnerability and its connection with resistance. Being told she had cancer made Lorde “forcibly and essentially” aware of her mortality and physical vulnerability (Lorde, 2009, 39). Lorde argues her acute sense of bodily vulnerability is not unique to her; many women are also fearful. Lorde suggests that her reaction to this fear – silence – is common too. Many women believe that being quiet and bearing injustices silently will somehow shield them from harm, including physical harm. Silence becomes wrongly equated with survival.

Lorde argues that women, by remaining aware of their body's vulnerabilities, may realize that quiet obedience will not shield them from pain or death. As Lorde puts it, “[y]our silence will not protect you” (Lorde, 2009, 39). Lorde never denies that speaking out can be painful or risky. Indeed, she is clear that resistance may bring discomfort, suffering, and even death. Yet, as Lorde frames it, these risks are an inevitable condition of human life, especially for women of color who live under systemic oppression and are exposed to the threat of physical attack (Lorde, 2009, 39). For Lorde, then, bodily vulnerability is unavoidable, especially for Black women who are victims of regular domination and injustice.

Lorde recognizes how oppressive social norms and arrangements construe individuals' and groups' vulnerabilities as a sign of inferiority and use them as a tool of oppression. Yet Lorde also challenges the dominant understanding of vulnerability as a flaw, a weakness or a lack that needs to be eliminated. Rather, she approaches vulnerability as a potentially powerful source of resistance. The crucial move that women must make, according to Lorde, is radical *acceptance* that their bodies are in peril and open to attack. In part, this realization affects the sense of one's self. The “transformation of silence” into “language and action” is an act of “self-revelation” (Lorde, 2009, 40). But, women's radical acceptance of their assailable bodies builds bridges to others too, disclosing one's commonality with others within resistance. Speaking with others who are similarly situated or like-minded is not an easy process. It is “fraught with danger” and, through it, a woman becomes “not only a casualty” but “also a warrior” (Lorde, 2009, 40). Women have a responsibility to listen to other women's experiences, recognize them as valuable, and examine them in the broader context of intersecting axes of oppression (Lorde, 2009, 42).

Lorde admits that her ideal of listening to others and striving for understanding of their situated identities and vulnerabilities is often not reached. The process is marred by omissions and silences that reflect and entrench existing conditions of oppression. She notes that Black women's fear and vulnerability may make them turn against each other. Out of unease and panic, they may direct the hatred they are experiencing at the hands of the system against each other (Lorde, 2009, 227). Each Black woman's silence bears “the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment,” the risk of which comes with visibility, with speaking out (Lorde, 2009, 41).

Similarly, building solidarity through recognizing vulnerability is

not an easy, amicable, or necessarily successful process. Yet it can attune us to the existence of oppression in unexpected places and forge new solidaristic encounters. Affirming women's different vulnerabilities, for instance, involves anger as “a liberating and strengthening act of clarification,” which enables us to identify “our allies” and “our genuine enemies” (Lorde, 1984, 203). Listening to anger implies acknowledging another woman's “agony I do not share, or to which I myself have contributed,” without “denial or immobility or silence or guilt” (Lorde, 1984, 204, 206). For instance, anger may pave the way toward examining “the contradictions of self, woman as oppressor” (Lorde, 1984, 207). It might encourage privileged women to recognize that their situation offers them a more comprehensive range of “pretended choices and rewards for identifying with patriarchal power and its tools.” Furthermore, they might also learn that such promises of “sharing power” are only a “pretence” (Lorde, 1984, 190).

As with Beauvoir, Lorde understands that centering on women's bodies opens novel possibilities for resistance. Black women, for instance, can create solidarity as Black women. Through radical acceptance of embodied vulnerabilities, women resisters can construct and articulate something new: an embodied, situated vision of freedom that was not there before.

Lorde and the tragic dilemmas of resistance

Though she writes in a different time and context from Beauvoir, Lorde confronted a similar kind of dilemma associated with embodied resistance. While Beauvoir's dilemma arose as a choice between Boupacha and the FLN, Lorde presents the dilemma in more general terms and situates it within many resistance movements. Lorde's dilemmas come from her practical political engagements in left-wing social movements, such as the feminist movement, the black freedom movement, and the lesbian and gay liberation movement. She thought these movements often paid insufficient attention to complex intersections of identity and the conflicting solidarities that emerged from them.

For instance, Lorde argued that second-wave feminism's focus on the experience of white, privileged women rendered invisible the forms of oppression experienced by women of color, poor women, or lesbians. To put Lorde's point in conversation with Beauvoir, second-wave feminists confronted a dilemma of resistance. They could support their own concerns or endanger the unity of the movement and support the needs of other crucial constituencies within it. Lorde points out that second-wave feminists resolved this dilemma to their advantage. They chose to prioritize their own embodied needs over those of others; they did not listen to their sister outsiders.

For Lorde, this “pretence to a homogeneity of experience” did not make the fight against gender oppression more effective (Lorde, 1984, 186). On the contrary, the refusal to recognize women's different vulnerabilities played into the patriarchal strategy of “divide and conquer” and entrenched unequal encounters (Lorde, 1984, 179). Practical solidarity only comes from recognizing the interdependency between different women and valuing their context-specific vulnerabilities as a source of strength rather than as a cause for “separation and suspicion” (Lorde, 1984, 178).

Similarly within the Black freedom struggle, Lorde warned against the tendency to misname the “need for unity” as “a need for homogeneity” (Lorde, 1984, 191). Here again, this issue can be framed as a dilemma of resistance in which the needs of Black women can be pitted against the needs of Black men. Because of the “racial erasure that Black women and Black men share” and the necessity for “shared battle” against it, Black feminist perspectives have often been perceived as a “betrayal of our common interests as a people” (Lorde, 1984, 191–92).

Far from furthering the struggle against racism, however, Lorde insists that a refusal to support the fight for gender equality is impoverishing the fight for racial justice (Lorde, 1984, 192; Lorde & Baldwin, 1984). In a revealing dialogue with James Baldwin, for instance, Lorde argued that Black community should acknowledge the sexual violence

that some Black men inflicted on Black women and show solidarity with Black women through acknowledgment. Baldwin presented a different view; he linked sexual violence in Black communities to Black men's castrating experiences of not providing for or protecting their families. Violence to Black women happens when "a man's ashamed of himself when he can't find a job...When he can't protect anybody... Do you know what happens to a man when he can't face his children because he's ashamed of himself?" (Lorde & Baldwin, 1984, 12). Lorde disagreed, arguing that Black women and Black men need to challenge the internalized sexist and heterosexist distortions "with the same kind of openness and dedication" used to examine racism (Lorde & Baldwin, 1984, 7). While recognizing "we live in the mouth of a dragon," she argues, we need to "break through" the masculinist assumptions and ideas of manliness that legitimize the shedding of "female blood" (Lorde & Baldwin, 1984, 10, 7).

Lorde celebrates solidarity across difference

As we have seen, Lorde, like Beauvoir, exposes the tragic dilemmas arising from conflicting solidarities. Moreover, Lorde reveals how choosing the freedom of one constituency may silence historically disempowered groups within movements. A collective struggle for freedom in one dimension may result in – and replicate – oppression in another dimension.

Lorde's response to the tragic dilemmas is distinct, however, because she sees them as opportunities for solidarity, inclusion, and innovation. Rather than viewing these conflicts as dilemmas in which one internal group will triumph over another constituency, Lorde frames these clashes as openings to affirm solidarity across differences. In her conversation with Baldwin, for instance, she challenged the view that the needs of Black women should be muted or silenced to preserve a more unified, stronger movement for Black liberation. Rather, Lorde insisted that the dilemma itself exposed the need for different groups, Black women, men, and children, to listen and affirm solidarity based on their distinct embodied vulnerabilities.⁴

For Lorde, there are two problems with seeing these encounters as zero-sum dilemmas in which a choice must be made. First, these dilemmas (and their supposed solutions) use socially and politically constructed differences and vulnerabilities as "pretexts for division and domination" (Turner, 2021, 571). Resisters, who are embedded in and conditioned by hierarchies of inequality, can reproduce the exclusionary practices of the hegemonic system. Second, Lorde objected to a deeper problem: the underlying hierarchal assumptions embedded in a dilemma that will yield a winner and a loser. A failure of this kind of framing was that it reduces the complexity of human experience to the simplistic binaries of winner/loser, superior/inferior, good/bad, dominant/subordinate (Turner, 2021, 571). As Lorde explains, "we have all been programmed to respond to... [human] difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate" (Lorde, 1984, 184). For Lorde, internecine zero-sum dilemmas tend to destroy the views of those seen as subordinate. Rather than highlighting the complexity of freedom, the dilemma view tends to reduce, simplify, and silence.

⁴ Beauvoir gestures to a similar kind of solidarity in her later work. For instance, Beauvoir supported the Iranian women, who, in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, took to the streets to protest the obligatory veil put in force by Khomeini's newly established Islamic regime. Beauvoir argued against the hesitations from the Left at the time, which feared the affirmation of solidarity with the Iranian women may end up situating them on the wrong end of the geopolitical conflict: "We must denounce the outrages without allowing ourselves to be intimidated by the fact that we are Westerners" (Picq, 2015, 238). She worked to bring to light "the depth of utter humiliation with which [the Iranian women] are threatened" and affirmed the solidarity of Western women with their struggle (Beauvoir, 2015, 268–69).

Framing these issues as dilemmas is a move away from freedom, not toward it.

But, framed in a better way, these internal clashes can further the cause of freedom. For Lorde, difference presents an opportunity to build solidarity when all parties engage in radical acceptance of their bodily vulnerability. The implication of this analysis for resistance goes beyond the need to reject oppressive, binary understandings of difference. For Lorde, mutual recognition of difference – that is, the willingness to communicate and work through our context-specific vulnerabilities on equal terms – constitutes a powerful source of collective action and thus an opportunity to transform unequal encounters toward greater freedom and equality (Turner, 2021, 582). The "interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal" creates a different form of relating to each other and the world and generates power to resist the forces of oppression and division (Lorde, 1984, 177–78).

While recognizing the immense potential in connecting different struggles across differences, Lorde was aware that there are no straightforward answers about resisting the intersecting oppressions stemming from racist, sexist, and homophobic encounters. As she states, "any future vision which can encompass all of us, by definition, must be complex and expanding, not easy to achieve" (Lorde, 1984, 218). Revolution "no longer means guns at high noon" and cannot be thought of as "a one-time event," she soberly remarks (Lorde, 1984, 225–26). Instead, the struggle for change comes closer to "doing the unromantic and tedious work necessary to forge meaningful coalitions," without confidence "that change is coming" (Lorde, 1984, 226).

Based on her own experience, Lorde was painfully aware of the sense of aloneness and helplessness that came from standing apart from any pre-given vision of resisters' unity. She understood how tirelessly exposing the exclusionary tendencies within different liberation movements could lead to despair. For instance, Lorde recounts she was "terrified" when reading aloud her poem "Need: A Chorale for Black Women's Voices." She feared that "my sisters, who, out of their own fear and vulnerability, might betray me." She was also petrified of "my brothers' anger, of being called traitor, of being accused of giving weapons to the enemy" (Lorde, 2009, 178). Yet Lorde also recounts surprising moments of solidarity such as when a young Black male student "spoke up" during the discussion with Baldwin and, hearing Lorde's view, defended his mother's and his sisters' "right to defend themselves in the street" (Lorde, 2009, 179).

Lorde, like Beauvoir, recognized that solidarity across difference might not always be possible. Given the patterns of structural injustice, individual sacrifices may be necessary steps on the path to building powerful coalitions. More than this, some coalitions may not be possible at all (Lorde, 1984, 226). However, while Beauvoir focused on challenging broader structures of oppression, Lorde emphasized that resistance "against the external conditions of our oppression" will not suffice (Lorde, 1984, 227). What must complement it is a revolution that happens "inside of us" (Lorde, 1984, 225). This internal revolution includes fighting the sense of despair and futility that "oppression plants within each of us" (Lorde, 1984, 227). In addition, the resisters must resist "that loathing buried deep within each one of us and see who it encourages us to despise" and initiate a different way of encountering others as equals (Lorde, 1984, 227). By focusing on the importance of an internal revolution, Lorde draws attention to the small-scale revolutionary acts, such as taking every opportunity to make "a genuine change" in established, oppressive encounters and addressing "each other's difference with respect" (Lorde, 1984, 225).

We have seen how Lorde rethinks our embodied vulnerabilities as a powerful source of collective action, rather than a constraint on resistance 'proper.' For Lorde, the acknowledgment of vulnerability in ourselves and others can challenge internalized patterns of oppression that reproduce broader structures of domination. Her emphasis on a radical acceptance of vulnerability allows resisters to face intersecting oppressions and conflicting commitments. Lorde, therefore, does not see tragedy as an inevitable companion of resistant action. Nevertheless, she

also recognizes how individuals' internal revolution may be helpless against the overwhelming forces of structural oppression. Entrenched patterns of interaction may make recognition across differences impossible and induce a sense of division, loss, and despair.

Conclusion

The 'honorary man' framework includes women in the ranks of resistance. Therefore, it might appear to be inclusive at first glance. However, this framework is fundamentally in error because it ignores the embodied and situated character of women's resistance experience, framing their embodiment as a constraint upon proper resistance. Women can become 'real' resisters only if they manage to overcome or transcend the limitations associated with their embodiment. As we related in the introduction, this vision of proper resistance is limited and cannot adequately explain the resistance of celebrated women like Aubrac or the unseen resistance of women who operate in the shadows.

Building on the pioneering work of feminist historians, we examined how an embodied feminist approach altered the conception of resistance. We turned to Lorde and Beauvoir for insight. For Lorde, as with Beauvoir, to ignore the female body is to make a fundamental error in imagining resistance. We will never understand the political world correctly, according to Lorde and Beauvoir, by focusing on normative actors (men) as the honorary man trope does. Insight comes, rather, through a focus on non-normative actors who have been cast to the side and on elements of resistance that have been occluded, forgotten, or ignored (bodies, contexts, tragedies). As bell hooks aptly put it, comprehension comes by bringing the margin to the center (hooks, 2015).

With Aubrac's example in mind, we drew on Beauvoir and Lorde to develop a notion of feminist resistance that is embodied and situated in unequal social contexts. Beauvoir's thinking of embodiment as an inescapable condition of resistance discloses how women resisters can leverage the existing oppressive understandings of their embodiment to their advantage and uncover novel possibilities for resistance disregarded within the honorary man theme. At the same time, Beauvoir directs attention to how oppressive meanings attached to women resisters' bodies significantly constrain their freedom of resistant action. Women resisters' embodiment exposes them to gender-specific vulnerabilities and confronts them with tragic dilemmas that have no easy answers. Thus, Beauvoir's insights reveal complex aspects of women's resistance that remain occluded within the honorary man trope, including how resisters may end up reproducing oppressive gender norms and unequal relationships of power. Aubrac, for instance, duped the Gestapo because she perpetuated heterosexist notions about motherhood, marriage, and women's limited agency, as well as racist notions about proper white femininity.

Yet, within Beauvoir's framework, embodiment still acts as a potential constraint upon women's resistance activity. Lorde's rethinking of embodied resistance here took us a step further in subverting the honorary man trope and invited us to consider the vulnerabilities stemming from women's embodiment as a potentially powerful source of solidarity and collective action. Like Beauvoir, Lorde recognized the tragic dilemmas of embodied resistance. But Lorde portrayed these dilemmas as opportunities for affirming solidarity across difference. Mutual recognition of one another's embodied vulnerabilities, Lorde insisted, can resist the zero-sum framing of these dilemmas. It can challenge the dynamics by which resistance practices reproduce the exclusionary practices of the hegemonic system and transform unequal relationships toward greater equality.

Beauvoir's and Lorde's challenges to the honorary man idea offered different conclusions about how women resisters might be able to negotiate and respond to the embodied dilemmas of resistance. Both, however, are important in shedding light on distinct aspects of women's complex resistance experience based on different contexts of resistance they are speaking to. Beauvoir may have been too quick in presenting

women resisters' tragic dilemmas as unsolvable. Yet she was addressing a context of extreme oppression and violence that left little scope for freedom and moral choice. Her perspective is significant in revealing how gendered norms pose powerful constraints upon women's resistance activity—constraints that cannot be changed through any individual's efforts but require structural change. After all, Lorde herself acknowledged that women resisters' attempts to recognize one another's embodied vulnerabilities may remain helpless against structures of oppression, and lead to a sense of helplessness and loss. Nevertheless, Lorde's reframing of tragic dilemmas as occasions for creativity expanded our imagination of how women resisters can assume their margin of freedom within a constraining situation and challenge oppressive gender norms at work within the resistance movement. Certainly, this conclusion may have been shaped by the fact that Lorde wrote in the context of a democratic society which, while deeply oppressive and violent, allowed resistance movements more scope (and time) for dialogue and deliberation. Still, her perspective inspires us to view seemingly unsolvable tragic dilemmas anew and reveal opportunities for affirming solidarity across difference in contexts of extreme oppression as well.

Thinking resistance as embodied allowed us to shed light on women resisters' novel possibilities for action, reveal their gendered vulnerabilities and delve into the difficult dilemmas they encounter in their resistance activity. Ultimately, our aim was to offer conceptual tools for scholars and activists to think beyond the honorary man framework. We believe these conceptual tools could be of use to feminist historians of resistance as well as feminist scholars across the social sciences, including the fields of political theory, sociology, and anthropology, and activists involved in multipronged struggles for freedom and justice today. We hope our critique of the honorary man traditions and our vision of embodied resistance will lead to a greater appreciation and further explorations of the complexities of resistance as experienced by women and other non-normate actors.

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