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Reframing "Home" and Making Oddkins through Posthuman Feminism

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Abstract: Historical factors have led traditional feminists to oppose the concept of "home" as being privileged. However, this paper finds rejection of "home" can lead to a crisis of ontological displacement and disorientated identity. As such, this paper wishes to remodel the idea of "home" rather than distance oneself from it. To do so, inspired by post-human feminism, this paper advocates an imagination of a "home" constituted of horizontally linked Oddkins, assembled and pieced together from heterogeneity. Furthermore, this paper believes that vulnerability theory provides a way to break through the closed subjects, enabling the subject to empathize with the Others horizontally and connect with Others and build an odd-kinship. The main purpose of this paper is to reframe the scope of both family and ethical accountability and thereby liberate the one oppressed or colonized by the traditional conception of "home".

Keywords: home, oddkin, post-human feminism, vulnerability

1. Introduction

Historical factors, such as women's confinement to immanent activities like maintenance of the home, have led traditional feminists like Luce Irigaray and Simone de Beauvoir to oppose the concept of "home" as being privileged [1, 2]. However, this paper finds itself in agreement with Iris Marion Young's critique and reminder that, while criticism of the uneven distribution of agency is indeed important, rejection of "home" can lead to a crisis of ontological displacement and disorientated identity [3]. As such, this paper wishes to review the controversial genealogy of attitudes toward "home", incorporating Iris Marion Young's internal criticism of feminism, and developing the concept of "home" as a potential matrix of resistance to the feminine Other [3].

2. Home as an Oppressive Concept for Feminists

"Home" is a complex idea. Besides the connotation of comfort and warmth, most feminists have found "home" also a certain degree of oppression towards Others. Therefore, these feminists suggested that "home" is an idea that should be withdrawn. In this section, the paper will conclude the reasons why "home" is notorious to feminists and elaborate on each of them.

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2.1. Women's Confinement to Immanent Activities

Women's domestic labour has hindered them from their own project of identity and subjectivity. Beauvoir appropriated the framework of existentialism to examine the existential attributes of gender division of labour. Women traditionally are assigned to do housework; however, according to Beauvoir's analysis, housework is a kind of existential activity that could not realise one's subjectivity. One could only actualise its subjectivity through activities with transcendence; for example, positively building one's home, battling one's freedom, and other activities enabling one to break through its static being and realise its transcendent potentiality. Whereas, unlike activities with transcendence embodying power and creativity, immanent activities like doing housework are lacklustre and could not embody one individual characteristic and therefore irrelevant to one's project of subjectivity. What women are assigned do at home is preservation, and preservation could be a Sisyphean task: it is fruitless and frustrating. What women have cleaned up would always become dusty again, and then women must do it repeatedly, without picturing the ultimate end of their tasks [2]. The very nature of women's works at home has deprived them of a sense of reward, and since women could not find meaning in their work, they could not formulate their own subjectivity from their actions and activities as well. Unlike men building their own identities by doing transcendent activities, women's confinement to immanent preservation works only makes them alienated from their subjectivities and identities.

2.2. Women as Substitutes for the Original Mother

The reasons why women's opportunity to actualise their subjectivity are hindered are not only because they are confined to immanent housework, but also because women are considered as a substitute for the original mother, the original homeland. The bond between women and the "home" has been strengthened to ensure other people's subjectivities' projects. In An ethics of sexual difference, Irigaray pointed out that after a person is born and forced to leave his or her mother's womb, one loses his or her very first homeland at the same time. From then on, there is a non-stop attempt to compensate for the loss of this original home: people will actively build their own homes so that they can regain a sense of security in the mother's womb, where the wholeness of identity was intact [1]. However, building a new home to replace the nostalgia for the original homeland has conditions: it needs women to be nourishment providers both mentally and materially. Women in a way are alienated from building materials of building other people's homes and identity wholeness. Women are expected to provide men with material and mental nourishment in the creation of men's homes, and to provide service and care for men and children to offer safety, security and comfort ontologically and assist them to return to their original homelands restoring their integrity of subjectivity.

However, while men retrieve their "homes" through women's assistance, women themselves have been deprived of the ability to build their hometowns connecting with their original "homes" for themselves for good. While the whole family has found their original hometown, women have lost their connection with their original "home" forever in the process of contributing to the subjectivities of other people. Therefore, without the chance to return to the original "home", women's subjectivity and identity would always be incomplete. In other words, in this project of rebuilding a "home" to complete the integrity of identity, the identity integrity of the woman itself is not only suppressed but even becomes a building material for other people's homeland. That is, women cannot become a subject in the project of the "home", because women are almost considered synonymous with "home" in men's conception of the "home". The woman must be assured of housekeeping work to ensure the stability and the foundation of the "home". Women in a sense become men's emotional and material

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refuge, a substitute for the original “home”, allowing men to escape the pain and frustration of the public sphere.

Equating women to “home” not only happens in the sphere of ontology and psychoanalysis but also in the sphere of history. After the nineteenth century, the development of capitalism and industrialization profoundly affected the relationship between home space and women. With the increase of external stimuli from capitalization and industrialization, "home" also works harder to resist these threats and strives to prevent pollution of the public domain. As a result, the binary opposition between the private and public spheres has deepened along with capitalism and industrial development. To defend the sanctification of “home”, the women in the home field are also constructed as "home angels". The phenomenon that women have been deemed as home angels and are forced to be homogeneously connected with the “home” was described by the feminists Davidoff and Hall as “domesticated femininity” [4]. The binary opposition between the spatial orientation of women and pure home and men and the polluted industrial and commercial environment was strengthened during this period by capitalization and industrialization. Women are homogenized into the “home” itself, and their entire task of existence is to maintain the “home” for other people. And these expectations equating women with “home” are preventing women from devoting their energies to their own projects of developing subjectivities.

2.3. Colonialism Embedded in the Concept of Home

Contemporary feminists like Biddy Martin, Chandra Mohanty, and Bonnie Honig all expressed that the conception of “home” inappropriately embedded the connotation of colonialism [5, 6]. For it, they urged people to dispel the idea of “home”. According to their analysis, the sense of having a home as a bounded identity is associated with privilege and this privilege of being at home could be realised not only by depriving and excluding gender others but also class others and racial others at the same time.

For example, the sense of security and comfort experienced by colonial immigrants in the colonies was based on the exclusion of the colonized and the lower classes. Being at home comfortably is through the labour of many others who are not members of the “home” and were not guaranteed the comfort of it. Therefore, the “home” could be considered an exclusive structure, this structure exchanges the interests and safety of people inside the structure by squeezing the human costs outside the structure. The premise of a sense of security and wholeness at home is a luxury vested interest that excludes the middle and lower classes as others and keeps wandering in an environment that is not as safe as home [6].

Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty stated that "being home" means cohesion and security, but they also believed that being home is an illusion at same time, which is based on exclusion, oppression and repression toward Others, humans not being inside one’s “home” [5]. These contemporary feminists basically oppose the idea of “home” from a post-colonial perspective. They believe the form of “home” represents the dream of colonization of genders, races, classes, etc. For the will of the “home”, one being at home would block everything hindering the will of the “home”, and paranoidly distinguish who is inside the boundaries of “home” and who is outside the boundaries of “home”.

3. The Reasons Why Home is Still a Necessity for Women

Although the feminists this paper listed above all suggested women should abandon the idea of “home” ontologically, epistemologically, and ethically, since they all deemed “home” as a site where oppression happens, Iris Young reminded women that leaving “home” itself is a dangerous idea as well [3]. This paper continues in the vein of Iris Marion Young’s criticism [3], suggesting the reason why women should stick with the idea of “home” is two-fold.

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3.1. Home as an Ontological Security

In traditional philosophical ontology, "dwelling" is an important issue, and "home" and "existence" have a nearly synonymous relationship. Heidegger and Levinas have such a topological tendency . Functions of "home" such as rest, shelter, memory, and labour provide subjects' material preconditions for self-identification [7, 8, 9]. In Heidegger's works Being and Time and Building Dwelling Thinking, he all indicated that dwelling is the most fundamental form of being-in-the-world and attribute of Being [7, 8]. If an individual does not occupy a so-called "home" conducting his or her daily activities and does not thus form a habitual relation towards the world around him or her, he or she would not be able to anchor his or her Being in the world, to measure his or her relationship with the world, and thereby to locate who he or she is. In short, "home" is a matrix of one's being. A human deprived of "home" is a human without continual identification. What is needed to be preserved here is called ontological security, which means a sense of control over oneself through being at home [10]. Therefore, if women followed what former feminists guided, they would face the crisis of being ontologically disorientated. And since restoring women's subjectivities and identifications is the main task of this paper, letting women face the crisis of losing ontological security is not a strategy this paper would consider.

3.2. Home as a Matrix of Resistance

Though "home" is a place where oppression usually happened, Hooks stated that "home" indeed has some positive political connotations [11]. Hooks appealed to Black Americans' slavery history showing that the homeplace is the place where slaves could still own a certain degree of freedom to resist the inhuman environment and the place ensured slaves could still find shelters and therefore could preserve their existential esteem as real humans [11]. Yet contemporary feminists would like to fly away from home to fight for the rights of Others, one should still realise that without certain extents of form and structure, the power of resistance would only fall into a meaningless flux. If one expected that the power of resistance could be formed as a community with a valid political agency, then one should offer it a matrix, and "home" could serve this role and function [12]. If it is used properly, "home" could gather the power of Others and make their voice against the privileged more powerful. "Home" is a tool that the oppressed can use to develop resistance. For example, "home" can be a centre for the oppressed to assemble and organize resistance movements, because "home" is in a sense a place where the privileged cannot fully reach, thus creating the possibility of political mobilization [11]. Since "home" could both be a site of dominance and a site of resistance, the pressing question is how women approach the "home" with the right distance and proper means. This will be discussed in the next section.

4. Making Oddkins through Vulnerability

4.1. Post-human Feminism's Advocation for Making Oddkins

This paper has so far confirmed both the colonization and the domination found within the "home" and its positive political potential of it. In sum, the paper accepted Young's lens that it is remodelling the "home" rather than distancing oneself from it that one should adopt [1]. This section would try to offer a possible route provided by post-human feminism to remodel the concept of "home". Most importantly, the remodelled "home" should be expected to avoid the problems listed in the second section of this paper, which is women's confinement to immanent activities, women as a substitute for the original mother, and colonialism embedded in the concept of home. In other words, the calibrated "home" conception should allow women involve in transcendent building activities, enable

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them to participate in their subjectivities' projects, and make the privilege of the home extend its tentacles to Others, the colonised.

Because of its core critique of humans and Man [13], post-human feminism has provided some new imaginations for the concept of "home". Post-human feminist Haraway proposed actively creating kinship and making kins for oneself. Moreover, the kinship she specifically indicated is a kind of one different from the traditional kind that is patriarchal, heterosexual-sexually, and anthropocentric [14]. Contained the spirit of post-human feminism critique, odd kins is an assemblage that is more-than-human, other-than-human, and more-than-Man, other-than-Man at the same time connected by heterogeneous entities. The lens of post-human feminism suggests that the existing and the given imagination of "home" and "family" should be broken through and the alternative imagination of the kinship that is formed and connected by what is unfamiliar, odd, and uncanny should be actively invented [14].

The main reason why this campaign is meaningful is that the current concept of "home", "family", and "kinship" have created too many ruptures and oppressions between the we-ness and the otherness. Therefore, reimagining the nature of kinship means reimagining the way of connecting between all things. Kinship in Haraway's sense is beyond the lineal genealogy and, from the perspective of multispecies ethnography of anthropology [14], it could be discovered that the genealogy-type kinship itself is a product of the power construction. For example, in many peripheral cultures that have not been influenced by the dominant idea that kinship is lineal and genealogical, non-genealogical kinship is still preserved. According to the research of anthropologist Deborah Brid Rose, Australian aboriginal people hold the belief that wild dogs are their family, their kins and humans and wide dogs are both parts of the country created by dreaming. Australian aboriginal people's point of view is an actual instance showing what would happen if the scope of kinship has been expanded from the traditional definition of it. Since Australian aboriginal people's understanding of the family's scope is expanded beyond the blood relatives of the human genealogy, the fate of wild dogs thus is included within the scope of their care, responsibility, and mourning [15]. Therefore, the death of the wild dog is no longer insignificant to the Australian aboriginal people. When wild dogs are shot and poisoned, they are deemed as the vulnerable, dying members of the family whose destiny is intertwined with human family members rather than as immaterial Others.

In conclusion, the core reason why post-human feminists advocate the importance of making oddkins is that they hope to break through the limitations of the lineal, genealogical kinship and open up the monadic presupposition of the closed concept of "home". Post-human feminists hope to improve the relationship of all things and form a new imagination of "home" as a community with shared destiny through creating kinship.

4.2. Vulnerability as a Key to Assembling Heterogeneous Entities

The advocation of making oddkins proposed by post-human theory has demonstrated what a remodeled home would be like. While, how to achieve this goal is still a problem needed to be answered. This paper suggests that the vulnerability theory developed in recent years by Judith Butler would be a possible key to opening up the closed family and relatives of immediate blood relatives [16]. This section would examine whether this key is valid.

Vulnerability is generally seen as the opposite of agency. It is viewed as disabled and in need of protection, summoning the urge of being placed under patriarchal guardianship. However, Butler's research showed that vulnerability could also be a way of exertion. Vulnerability in her point of view embodies the ability of openness, being willing to be affected [16]. And being able to be affected could be the inception of an ethical relationship, meaning the closed subject has been opened up and ready to establish a new bonding, in this case, it means building a new horizontal "home" and "kinship" with the non-we-ness. The "home" imagination based on the idea of vulnerability could transcend the

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traditional "home" and is more ethical. In Butler's words, it is called "the ethics of cohabitation", and it could only be achieved by the ability to respond to others [16]. Vulnerability opens up closed subjects, enabling the subject to link with the Others horizontally and form an alliance as a family, reframing the scope of both family and ethical responsibility accountability.

5. Conclusion

Even though the conception of "home" is generally criticized by feminists for its potential colonialism toward women and others, this paper would like to defend the value of "home" and remodel it. In answering how one could remodel "home" while not abandoning it, this paper appropriated the resource of post-human feminism and vulnerability theory. This paper suggests that imagining a "home" constituted of horizontally linked oddkins, assembled and pieced together from heterogeneity could be a potential matrix of resistance for the feminine Other. Moreover, the paper deems the vulnerability theory developed by Judith Butler as the key to opening up the closed family and relatives of immediate blood relatives. Through vulnerability, closed subjects are opened up, empathizing with the Others horizontally and reframing the scope of both family and ethical responsibility accountability. Since making oddkins actively breaks through passive immanent women's situation and could be considered as an existentially transcendent activity that enables the weak and the oppressed like women to build their own "home", it, therefore, could be deemed as an endeavour to control the fate of one's subjectivity and earn an ontological identity. Making oddkins also implies an inclusion that Others could be considered as a part of we-ness, making it transcend the colonialism traditionally embedded in the concept of "home". Thus, this paper concluded that the remodelled "home" concept could avoid the troublesome traits embedded in the traditional "home" conception.

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