

FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND FOUCAULT

by

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A Thesis submitted to the

Graduate School-New Brunswick

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Master of Art

Graduate Program in Women's and Gender Studies

Written under the direction of

Prof. Elizabeth Grosz

And approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2009

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
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This thesis takes as a challenge to think about epistemology in a way that goes beyond epistemology understood as a philosophical discipline. I argue that it is important to deal with epistemological problems, because even in our everyday lives we are constantly in different epistemic situations that require explanations. Therefore, it is necessary to know what we claim when we claim to know something, that something we know is true, and how we explain or justify our knowledge or truth claims.

Traditionally speaking, all these problems have been considered within epistemology as a philosophical discipline, which is understood as abstract, disinterested and objective search for knowledge and truth, and its core concepts such as knowledge are defined as apolitical and devoid of any kind of social influence. In this thesis I argue for redefinition of the term 'epistemology' in order to keep the term while going beyond its understanding as a private conversation among philosophers themselves. Epistemology is understood now as an interdisciplinary field of research, which takes knowledge as a political event, and where knowledge and power are connected in various complex ways. Both French philosopher Michel Foucault and feminist epistemologists share this

understanding of knowledge and in subsequent chapters I explore, first, their accounts of epistemological problems, such as knowledge, the subject of knowledge and the ways how knowledge can be a form of resistance to dominant knowledge, and second, the points of the convergence and differences between Foucault's epistemology developed within his middle works – so-called 'genealogical', and feminist epistemological accounts, primarily developed by feminist standpoint theorist Nancy Hartsock and her feminist postmodern critics.

The main goals of this thesis are to provide a dialogue between Foucault and feminist epistemology in order to see how and to what extent Foucault's ideas of power, knowledge and resistance can be useful for feminist epistemological needs, and what feminist epistemological inquiry can be in the future.

Acknowledgements

The work on this thesis represents a kind of experiment because I tried to study at the very same time at two continents and at two different universities. The period I spent reading, exploring and writing this thesis I see as the most important challenge to my professional life and I believe that everything I have done would not be possible without help and support of different people and institutions both at the US and Serbia.

At Rutgers, I would like to thank my professors: Samira Kawash for creating the program of studying for me, Joanna Regulska for professional and emotional support at every moment I spent at Rutgers, and to Cheryl Clarke, Dorothy Sue Cobble and Elizabeth Grosz, whose courses played an important role during my stay at the US. I would like to thank as well to prof. Yana Rodgers, Director of MA studies at the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, for her assistance and help in many situations when problems occurred because of my absence from the US during the work on the thesis. Finally, I owe a deep gratitude to prof. Elizabeth Grosz, who accepted to supervise my work during very unusual circumstances, because most of the time we were in contact only through e-mails, and to my committee members, professors Ed Cohen and Harriet Davidson.

At Belgrade Women's and Gender Studies Department, I would like to thank my professors and friends: Dasa Duhacek, Jelisaveta Blagojevic and Dragana Popovic. A very special and warm gratitude is reserved for Dasa, who believes in me, and who

helped me with her advices, recommendations for my reading, and emotional support at every stage of my work on this thesis.

I would like also to thank the US Embassy in Belgrade, which supported me financially during my first stay at Rutgers University, and Reconstruction Women's Fund in Belgrade, which supported me during my various professional trips. I would like especially to thank Slavica Stojanovic from Reconstruction Women's Fund, whose feminist knowledge, enthusiasm and struggle are such a great inspiration for me and many other feminist thinkers and activists in Serbia.

At the end, I would like to thank my friends and family: Laura Lovin, a PhD student and Rutgers and my great friend – although we do not live in the same country and we see each other on rare occasions, my relationship with Laura is one of the most important in my life. I cannot describe how grateful I am to Laura, her help, support and friendship. I would also like to thank my Belgrade friends for their patience for me and my disappearance from their lives during the period of my writing: Jelena Visnjic, Suncica Sido and Jelisaveta Blagojevic.

A special and indescribable gratitude I owe to my family for their unconditional love and support and to Milutin, who was a part of this thesis at every stage and its first critical reader. His love and belief in my work and me especially during a hard period of writing I will never forget.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis has developed from the need to start thinking about epistemological problems beyond the confines of epistemology as a philosophical discipline, as well as the legacy and burdens of the project and tradition that have started with Plato, or alternatively with Descartes. My background in philosophy has made this task even more difficult, because a disciplinary ‘training’ I have made me a ‘specialist’ with already fixed ideas about what can be considered as a serious philosophical/epistemological problem, and what can only appear to be as a provocative insight that is easily dismissed by the rigorous and strict inquiry.

On the other hand, my background in Women’s and Gender Studies has made this task urgent and necessary, especially because the history of western philosophy is the history of multiple strategies of exclusions and marginalizations of voices that do not represent the unitary voice of *the philosopher himself*. Therefore, my intention to focus on specifically feminist epistemology can be seen as an act of critique against traditional epistemology and philosophy, for which the very idea of *the feminist* epistemology does not only seem as outrageous, but impossible as well. Alongside feminist and postmodernist interventions, my project continues not only to challenge traditional understandings of epistemology by enabling a dialogue between these precursors, more specifically by exploring similarities and differences between the critical voice of Michel Foucault and two representative strands of feminist epistemology – feminist standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism, but to specify the new ways of doing epistemology that are beyond epistemology understood as philosophical discipline.

My goal is to explore certain details of how both feminist epistemologists and Foucault react to the traditional framework, what problems they identify, to what extent their projects can be seen as parallel, at what point differences emerge and from what reasons. In order to do that, I have decided to explore Foucault's epistemological account given in his 'middle', genealogical works, not for its own sake, but primarily having in mind feminist epistemological needs, and thus to emphasize a dialogue between his and various feminist epistemological perspectives. These interpretative and analytical efforts enabled me to identify some of the consequences of their 'meeting' and conversations for the future of feminist epistemology.

The first chapter 'The End of Epistemology?' sets the background of discussion. I provide a general overview of the traditional epistemology and emphasize the problems that provoked both postmodernists and feminists to challenge that framework. The main goal of this chapter is to outline the positions of the authors I have chosen to discuss in subsequent chapters and to redefine the term 'epistemology' in order to keep it beyond its traditional and mainstream connotations.

The second chapter 'Foucault and Epistemology' deals primarily with Foucault's 'epistemological' views that he developed in his genealogical works. First I argue that genealogy can be seen as epistemological method and critique, and then I focus on some of Foucault's central concepts which have important epistemological consequences: the concept of power as productive and creative, the concept of knowledge and its relation to

power, the concept of the subject of knowledge as an ‘effect’ of the power and knowledge, and the idea of ‘subjugated knowledges’ as a form of resistance to dominant ones.

Although Foucault’s epistemology shares some of the main features with feminists epistemologies, such as the idea of knowledge as a political event, the inseparability of knowledge and power, and of epistemology and politics, the emphasis on the need for struggle in order to articulate ‘subjugated’ knowledges, the third chapter, ‘Feminist Epistemology’, shows that the relationship between Foucault and certain feminist epistemologists, such as Nancy Harstock, is very complex and their alliance almost impossible. In the third chapter, I discuss two different strands of feminist epistemology and their different ideas about the usefulness of Foucault’s work for feminist epistemological projects. These two different feminist approaches to epistemological problems – feminist standpoint theory and feminist postmodernism – represent two contrasted frameworks and the differences are crucial for their opposite understandings of Foucault’s work. I have decided to focus on three crucial concepts, which show similarities and important differences between Foucault and feminists epistemologists: power, the subject of knowledge/knower, and the role of ‘subjugated’ knowledges. The aim of the chapter is specify and articulate these similarities and differences.

In the concluding chapter, beside the summary of the inquiry of the previous ones, I articulate my own view on the dispute between feminist epistemologists and Foucault, and especially emphasize the limits of the feminist standpoint theory. I argue in favor of

feminist *epistemologies, theories* in the plural that would be focused on specific, local and particular. Our theories/epistemologies are not meant to stay with us forever. They are changeable, dynamic and temporary, and we should use them as tools in specific situations that we see as the moments for intervention and attack. And that is one of the major contribution of Foucault's genealogical work for feminist projects.

1 THE END OF EPISTEMOLOGY?

The aim of this chapter is to set the general background of the discussion about feminist and postmodernist approaches to and critiques of the traditional epistemology, as well as to outline in general terms what would be ‘postmodern’ position regarding the problematic of knowledge and the knowing subject, what similarities it shares with feminist epistemology, and what the main problems are in both traditional and postmodern approaches to epistemology for feminist reasoning about knowledge and knowing subject.

This chapter also outlines the epistemological positions of authors and theories that I have chosen to discuss in subsequent chapters: the ‘epistemological’ work of Michel Foucault, which is the topic of the second chapter, the feminist standpoint theory which will be presented in the third chapter through the work Nancy Hartsock and her critique of usefulness of Foucault for feminist epistemological and political projects, and the feminist postmodernists’ position as a critique of standpoint theories. I also redefine the term ‘epistemology’ in order to keep the term beyond its traditional and mainstream connotations.

1.1 Traditional Epistemology: An Overview

Epistemology or theory of knowledge is considered as one of the most important philosophical disciplines. It is often defined as a discipline or sub-discipline, which deals with a possibility, nature and limits of human intellectual achievements. Its objective is to answer questions such as: What is knowledge (that is, what does it mean to say that

someone knows)? What are conditions or criteria of good reasoning and of truth? How does perception affect knowledge? How to face the critics who question the possibility of knowledge, and how to respond to the dangers of skepticism?

In various histories of epistemology we can find that the first philosopher who started to deal with epistemological problems was Plato, who in one of his late dialogues, entitled *Theaetetus*,¹ tried to answer the most important epistemological question: “What is knowledge?” Since Plato, there is a conviction among epistemologists that knowledge is connected with belief in specific ways. It is evident, epistemologists are reasoning, that all knowledge is connected with belief, but not all beliefs are knowledge, even not all true beliefs. Plato tried to answer the question about knowledge offering the very first *definition* of knowledge in the history of philosophy, in which knowledge is a true belief plus *logos* (reason). Plato’s definition has evolved into a proposal of so-called “standard definition of knowledge”, according to which knowledge is a justified true belief, which occupies a very important place in epistemology of the twentieth century, and with which many epistemologists deal even today, either as its supporters or critics.²

On the other hand, epistemology has a more recent beginning. As a separate, autonomous field of inquiry within philosophy, epistemology began its development with Descartes in

¹ Cf. Plato (1973).

² The standard definition of knowledge suffered an attack by American epistemologist Edmund Gettier in 1963, who denied the success of the definition at a logical level. Cf. Gettier (1963). After Gettier’s article and even nowadays, many epistemologists still try to answer the ‘Gettier Problem’, either providing more convincing necessary and sufficient reasons for the definition, or proving that under certain conditions that

the seventeenth century. Until that period, epistemological questions were not separate from metaphysical ones, and Descartes' epistemological project was envisioned as a critique pointed directly against so-called Scholastic dogmatism. His book *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641)³ is usually presented as, on the one side, 'epistemological break' with the tradition of Scholasticism and dogmatism, and on the other, as the urgent need to save philosophy and epistemology from the dangers of skepticism. His idea to call all of his beliefs into doubt, "to demolish everything completely and start again from the foundations" (Descartes, 1984: 12) has marked the turning point in philosophy and epistemology, and from that moment political and practical influences, economic and social interests, beliefs supported by tradition, have become irrelevant in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. If we want to discuss epistemological problems of true beliefs, objective knowledge, how to acquire knowledge and justify it, we have to put aside everything connected to areas of politics, practice, economics and generally social life. "[Descartes] encouraged participants in philosophical discussions to adopt an Olympian standpoint" (Tiles, 1998: 411), and it has been widely assumed by traditional epistemologists that this 'Olympian standpoint' is universal, ahistoric, apolitical and not culturally limited. One of the most important tasks in *Meditations* is, therefore, to find the starting or the unquestionable, indubitable and certain point or the foundation of all knowledge. When the process of radical doubting reaches the end, the only thing that cannot be doubted is the existence of the doubter himself, or to be more precise, of the *mind* that doubts. And, since the doubting is the type of thinking, the only certain thing in

definition could be operative. Of course, not a small number of contemporary epistemologists have decided not to deal with problem of *definition* of knowledge at all.

³ Cf. Descartes (1984).

which we cannot doubt is the thinking *mind*. Influenced by Descartes' *Meditations*, Western traditional epistemology has become preoccupied with proposed indubitable or absolute foundations of knowledge, possible other solutions, but also with questioning the proposed models as inadequate or unjustified.

Although it is usually said that with Descartes modern epistemological project has started its development, it can be argued that in *one sense* his 'epistemological break' with the premodernism maybe is not so radical as it is usually seen.⁴

In premodern Europe, epistemic credibility was in correlation with social rank and privilege, so knowledge was the possession of the social elites – of kings and their courts, and of religious leaders.⁵ Therefore, the members of non-elites were regarded as epistemically unreliable and unable to distinguish true justified beliefs from falsehoods. Non-elites were, unsurprisingly, 'ignorant' peasants, 'immature' children, 'irrational' women and 'unreasonable' savages. Although, modern and the Enlightenment epistemology, speaks about the universal abstract individual without all particular features such as sex, race, class, as a paradigm of a *universal knower* who can achieve a neutral, ahistorical point of view in order to obtain objective (true) knowledge, more

⁴ I do not argue here that Descartes was not a radical thinker, because epistemology as we know today did not exist before him, and his critique of the scholastic dogmatism established in fact *knowledge* as the problem that required analysis. I have here something else in mind; the problem of one sort of *authoritarian* thinking that actually existed before Descartes, transformed with him and flourished at the age of the Enlightenment.

⁵ For a brief historical account of the transition from premodern to modern epoch, cf. Alcoff (2008): 201-205.

critical and contextual reading of the history of the Western epistemology⁶ shows us that epistemology continues with and after Descartes to carry the legacy of authoritarianism. So, contrary to the usual assumption that modern epistemology did not take subjectivity of the knower into the account of justified true beliefs, the critical story about the development of modern epistemology shows that it “attributed epistemic justification only to those subjects who could demonstrate the proper epistemic attitude, characterized by the use of reason and the maintenance of an objective stance” (Alcoff, 2008: 202). Those subjects throughout the history of modern philosophy have been *scientists* and *philosophers*, who represent the dominant *male* elite. This means that although modern epistemology was envisioned as an abstract inquiry separated from everything particular – political, economic, cultural, and generally social and contextual, it allowed a very particular subjectivity (that of male elite) to structure its project. And again, those who did not belong to the dominant male elite of philosophers and scientists - ‘ignorant’ peasants, ‘immature’ children, ‘irrational’ women and ‘unreasonable’ savages - were completely excluded from the realm of knowledge as epistemically unreliable.

When postmodernists and feminists attacked the traditional epistemological project, they recognized several distinctive epistemological features shared by modern/Enlightenment epistemologies. First, there is an assumption that *disembodied* reason can produce accurate and objective accounts of the world, or in other words, “the ‘god-trick’ was pervasive” (Hartsock, 1996: 41),⁷ which means that the disembodied and unlocated

⁶ Cf. Bordo (1987), Lloyd (1984).

⁷ Hartsock here uses Donna Haraway’s term ‘the god-trick’, which she introduced in Haraway (1988): 581.

reason is able of “seeing everywhere from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988: 581). Second, all traditional epistemologists believe in the *progressive* logic of reason and science. Third, they all assume that *differences* among the knowers are irrelevant, and therefore they are in position to posit human *universality* and *homogeneity*. Fourth, there is a possibility of transcendence through the *omnipotence of reason*: the knower, through the proper use of reason can escape the limits of the body, time and space, and contemplate the eternal problems related to ‘man’ as a knower. And fifth, all traditional epistemologists deny the connection between power and knowledge and the importance of power for knowledge – they claim that the *knower* and *power* should be held to be distinct.⁸

1.2 Postmodernist Rejection of Traditional Epistemology

The traditional way of reasoning, established by Descartes and his foundationalism, according to which unless knowledge has an absolute ground, it cannot qualify as knowledge and truth, has been widely criticized during the second half of the twentieth century not only by postmodern thinkers, but also by some mainstream analytical epistemologists.⁹ Postmodernists reject the Archimedean point as the absolute grounding

⁸ Cf. for all these features Hartsock (1996): 41. Similar summary of the epistemological features shared by modern/Enlightenment epistemologies can be found in Flax (1987): 624.

⁹ For example, Quine (1969) provided one of the strongest critiques of the traditional epistemology and its Cartesian motive for *absolute certainty*, which led him to propose the total abandonment of the normative question which occupied traditional epistemologists since Descartes – ‘How *should* we form our beliefs in order them to be justified?’ – and to focus instead on descriptive questions about how we *really* come to hold our beliefs about the (external) world. Quine even proposes that traditional epistemology should be replaced with psychology (and maybe with some other empirical sciences), which has a task to explore empirically our real route to knowledge. Although Quine’s proposal of the abandonment of epistemology as a normative discipline has not been widely accepted among epistemologists who believe that this move at best, deprives

for knowledge from which all knowledge is acquired. The search for the Archimedean point is the result of *privileging* of the rational discourse, which reflects one of the basic dualisms on which traditional epistemology rests – the dualism between rational and irrational. Postmodernists reject the privileging of the rational discourse and argue that there is no *one* privileged discourse, and that there is no discourse abstract from the social, cultural and political context as well. Therefore, if there is no absolute grounding for knowledge, and no unitary truth, then, postmodernists argue, there are plurality of *knowledges* and truths.

Second, and connected with the previous is the postmodernist attack on the Cartesian dichotomy between subject and object of knowledge. As we have seen, since Descartes, the search for certainty of knowledge has been grounded in the rationality of the knower/the knowing subject, and for Descartes that certainty is placed within himself: the subject is self-conscious guarantor of all knowledge. In traditional framework, the answer to the key question ‘What does it mean to know something?’ has been that to know is to represent the world accurately, to mirror it in the *mind*. The knower, or ‘he’, because woman has not been constituted as a knower, has to be able to isolate clear and distinct ideas from any process of the mind or body, and to relate those ideas to distinct objects in the world. Traditional epistemologists believed, with some exceptions,¹⁰ that there are necessary and transparent relations between the mind/subject and the external

epistemology of its autonomy, and at worst, pronounces the death of epistemology, what actually has been widely accepted among epistemologists since Quine’s critique is that the theoretical search for absolute certainty is useless: epistemology developed in the Cartesian spirit is an unsuccessful project.

¹⁰ Cf. Hume (2007).

reality/object. The metaphor of the mind as the mirror started with Plato and embraced by Descartes, but now has been

thoroughly discredited philosophically, by conventional philosophers of science like Thomas Kuhn ... and Paul Feyerabend ... as well as by poststructuralist philosophers like Derrida and Foucault. For these philosophers, ... knowledge is produced discursively, *within* a system of rules that govern what can count as a real object or process, or a 'true' or 'false' statement (Nash, 1994: 66).

Postmodern thinkers influenced by Nietzsche, who first attacked the subject-centered projects of the Enlightenment, reject the transcendental subject in favor of the subject that is historically *situated* and who is not the sole guarantor of knowledge and truth.¹¹ Knowledge is not acquired through the abstraction of an autonomous subject from separate object, but knowledge, as well as subject and object of knowledge, is *constituted* through forms of discourse. As we will see in the chapter devoted to Foucault, his genealogical method can be seen as an analysis that can account for the constitution of the subject of knowledge *within* a historical framework.

This general account of postmodernists' attack on the traditional epistemology should be seen as provisional because they do not represent homogeneous and unitary group, and any account that would try to represent them in that way will be not only wrong, but it will also neglect some important *differences* between various thinkers usually labeled as 'postmodernists'. Although they share some common features especially in their critiques

¹¹ Cf. Hekman (1990): 63.

of the traditional epistemology, in the next chapter I will focus only on the work of one 'postmodernist' philosopher,¹² the work of Michel Foucault.

From his earliest writings, Foucault was interested in epistemological problems and he provided probably one of the strongest critiques of the traditional epistemological framework. However, Foucault did not only criticize traditional epistemology, but also provided a new way of looking into the epistemological problems and potentially a new vision of what epistemology could be in the future. In both archaeological and genealogical works, Foucault challenges some of the core epistemological concepts and ideas, arguing against the ahistoric concepts of knowledge and the knower, subject-centered procedures of justification, and totalizing and universalistic pretensions of traditional accounts. In the second chapter, I will focus on Foucault's epistemological account he gave in his so-called genealogical or 'middle' works, primarily because in those works he develops a conception of power that has important consequences on epistemological concepts of knowledge and the knower/subject of knowledge. His conception of power as productive and creative is crucial for his understanding of the subject of knowledge, who is not any more constituting Cartesian subject, but constituted subject, an effect of power and knowledge constellation. This idea of the subject of knowledge as an effect has been widely criticized by feminists who argue that Foucault's subject, although he attributes him/her resistance, is too passive and without agency. In the third chapter I will provide feminist arguments for and against Foucault's ideas of power and subject of knowledge. On the other side, my focus on genealogy as

¹² I am using the quote marks because Foucault explicitly resists and rejects all the labels

epistemology is inspired by Foucault's account of genealogy as "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 2003: 7), of knowledges and knowers discredited and marginalized by the dominant totalizing theories. Genealogy is the method which not only focuses its attention to uncover all those marginalized discourses, but which calls for their rebellion, resistance against totalizing discourses. Subjugated, local knowledges have the potential, as counter-discourses, of creating new epistemological space, because their relation to power is different than that of dominant knowledges. Genealogy can be seen, therefore, as an epistemological method, which opens new possibilities for theorizing about knowledge.

1.3 Feminism and Postmodernism

There are a number of similarities between feminist and postmodernist critiques of the traditional epistemological projects, so it may appear that feminist epistemologists and postmodernists could be allies in their critiques of the Enlightenment thought.

First, feminists and postmodernists see the Enlightenment project as based on some hierarchical dualisms, such as those already mentioned above between subject and object of knowledge, or between rational and irrational. However,

Feminists assert that dualisms at the root of the Enlightenment thought are product of the fundamental dualism between male and female. In each of the dualisms on which Enlightenment thought rests, rational/irrational, subject/object, and culture/nature, the male is associated with the first element, the female with the second. And in each case the male element is privileged over the female (Hekman, 1990: 5).

Therefore, although feminists agree with some of the arguments made by postmodernists against the Enlightenment epistemology, their attack on its dualisms is even more radical:

all the dualisms of Enlightenment thought are defined by the basic masculine/feminine dualism, [and] ... this dualism is not symmetrical. ... Woman is always defined as that which is *not* man. ... [S]he is a 'minus male' who is identified by the qualities that she lacks (Hekman, *ibid.*: 30-31).

For feminists, the problem with the Enlightenment epistemological projects is not only in their privileging of abstract rationality, but in the fact that the privileged 'abstract rationality' is connected with men, while women are excluded from the domain of rationality and put within that of the irrational.

Second, and similar with the previous, problem for feminists with the traditional epistemological framework is not only that the subject is defined as transcendental subject, or as a generic man, but the fact that that subject is a gendered man. The man-centeredness of that project entails epistemology that is exclusive of women. Women are not defined as subjects/knowers, only as objects of knowledge. It seems, therefore, that feminist critique of traditional epistemology as masculinist adds the *missing* component in the critiques of postmodern thinkers, and that "feminist theory ... properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy" (Flax, 1987: 625). However, despite some important similarities between feminism and postmodernism, there are even more important differences which influence some feminists to be more than suspicious about the appropriateness of postmodern projects for feminists needs. There is "at best an uneasy relationship between postmodernists and feminists" (Hekman, 1990: 2), especially because of very complex relationship between feminism and the

Enlightenment's tradition. In other words, all feminisms, despite their differences, challenge the masculine/feminine dichotomy as it is defined in western epistemological thought, but at the same time, certain strands in feminism, such as liberal and Marxist/socialist feminisms, have the Enlightenment roots in their emphasis on some of the following concepts: autonomy, rights, liberation and emancipation. Certain strands in feminism criticize the Enlightenment's dualisms but refuse at the same time to embrace postmodern proposals for dissolution of all dualisms of the traditional project. Therefore, there is no consensus among feminist theorists about how to react to and theorize about the exposed dualisms of traditional epistemology. For example, although the concept of reason in the Enlightenment thought has been associated with men, not women, and although "since Greeks, rationality has been defined as a masculine mode of thought exclusive of women" (Hekman, *ibid.*: 47), feminist reactions to this problem have been very different. Liberal feminists believe that the Cartesian conception of reason could be opened up to include women, while Marxist/socialist feminists argue that the masculine mode of knowing includes distortion of knowledge and truth, and that rationality/reason should be redefined and reformulated so it could be applied to women. Radical feminists want to keep the rational/irrational dualism and to reverse the privileging. And, finally, so-called 'postmodern' feminists try to avoid the Enlightenment's 'trap' of keeping dualisms because they believe that the only solution for feminism is to "deconstruct and transform the ... [traditional] epistemology in which dualism is rooted. This involves ... rejecting unitary language for a plurality of languages that does not strive for the creation of a new orthodoxy, a unitary 'truth'" (Hekman, *ibid.*: 47).

The similar problem, as it may be assumed, appears in feminists' reasoning about the traditional dualism between subject and object of knowledge. 'What should we do with the subject of knowledge/knower?' is a question that has no one answer in feminism. Although the history of the western thought is the history in which only men could be subjects of knowledge while women are always and only objects, what would be a 'right' solution for feminism regarding this dualism? Are we going to turn women into Cartesian subjects, or are we going to reject that subject and reconceptualize it? Are we going to reconceptualize the traditional subject with or without the adoption of the postmodern options such as Foucault's? All these questions are of immense importance for feminist epistemologists and they give different answers and possible solutions depending on their theoretical and political commitments. However, all these differences and contentions among feminists have not resulted in any kind of theoretical 'despair'. On the contrary, these differences and contentions have been very productive for the heterogeneous field of the inquiry we call 'feminist epistemology'.

1.4 What Is Feminist Epistemology?

What is [then] 'feminist epistemology'? When the second-wave theorists first began to use the term 'feminist epistemology', it did not refer to a recognizable body of work. Rather the term referred to a set of theoretical and political problems concerning accounts of knowledge (Campbell, 2004: 7).

From the mid 1980s when the term has been introduced until now,¹³ feminist work in the field of epistemology has created not only a distinct area of research, but also various, heterogeneous, and complex feminist approaches to epistemological problems.

Although feminist work in epistemology began as a *critique* of the traditional epistemology, understood as one of the core *philosophical* disciplines, its further development has shown that we cannot

confine feminist epistemologies to a single academic discipline such as philosophy. ... [W]hile this research often utilizes philosophical terms and uses them as analytic categories, it also reshapes and recasts those terms and uses them as conceptual markers rather than as disciplinary claims. ... [F]eminist epistemology is necessarily political and interdisciplinary because it asks questions of epistemology which philosophy traditionally excludes from a theory of knowledge, or which conventional philosophy does not wish to answer (Campbell *ibid.*: 8-9).¹⁴

Therefore, the aim of feminist epistemology is not only to provide critiques of masculinist accounts of knowledge, traditional or contemporary ones, but to produce and develop *alternative* epistemological accounts and theories in plural, which take women not only as objects of knowledge, but primarily as subjects/knowers.

In 1986, feminist philosopher and epistemologist Sandra Harding¹⁵ introduced for the first time a classification of feminist epistemologies into three general approaches: *feminist empiricism*, *feminist standpoint theory/theories*, and *feminist postmodernism*. At that moment, she understood these three positions as essentially contrasted frameworks.

¹³ Some feminist epistemologists, for example, Dorothy Smith, dealt with epistemological problems even in 1970s. However, the term ‘feminist epistemology’ and the field of research as such emerged in 1980s.

¹⁴ The very same point is made in Alcoff and Potter (1993b): 2-3.

However, further development of feminist epistemologies has contributed to more fluidness of at least some of the boundaries on one side, and to acknowledgment that the classification itself cannot grasp all the varieties in feminist approaches to epistemological problems, on the other. Although it seems that this classification should be seen as provisional and tentative at best, it is still widely accepted among feminists.¹⁶

In this paper, I will follow Harding's classification although realizing that it is not complete and definite, primarily because for my purposes, two of these three initially understood as contrasted frameworks are relevant for the discussion in the third chapter – feminist standpoint theories and feminist postmodernism, and their advocates do see their approaches as contrasted.

In the third chapter, one of Harding's proposed approaches will not be elaborated – the position of so-called feminist empiricism. This strand in feminist epistemology deals with the epistemological problems as long as they are relevant for philosophy of science and scientific methodology, which are not the topics of this thesis. Feminist empiricism, further, works more or less within the framework of mainstream philosophy and methodology of science, and maybe that is the reason why mainstream epistemologists, when they do acknowledge the importance of feminist epistemology, usually have in mind feminist empiricists. Harding describes this position in 1986 as a kind of epistemology which realizes that androcentric science is 'bad science' which can be avoided by more scientific rigor and with strict application of traditional scientific norms:

¹⁵ Cf. Harding (1986): 24-29.

while certain scientific areas are distorted by gender-biased ideology, the methods of scientific inquiry are unquestionable. Harding, unfortunately, offers in 1986 a simplistic account of feminist empiricism, which she corrects in the latter book, published in 1991,¹⁷ where she realizes that the leading theories in feminist empiricism do not explain the examples of sexism and androcentrism as ‘bad science’ and do not accept traditional scientific norms as acceptable correctives. Current feminist empiricist theories claim that the scientific process is primarily social process and that the subject of knowledge cannot be an individual of traditional epistemology but communities, or in some versions, scientific communities.¹⁸ Nevertheless, this position will not be elaborated in the third chapter devoted to feminist epistemologies, because its area of research is not part of my inquiry.

The second position in the heterogeneous field of feminist epistemology, which Harding identified in 1986, is the position of so-called feminist standpoint theory/theories. These theories, at least in Anglo-American feminism, represent “the most developed example of ... [the] construction of feminist models of knowing” (Campbell, *ibid.* 16), as well as the most controversial proposals within the field of feminist epistemology. The main thesis of these thinkers is that knowledge is always mediated by a number of factors, such as a particular position of the knower/knowers in specific social, political world at the specific moments of history. Main sources for feminist standpoint theories are Hegel’s ‘Story of Master and Slave’ from *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Marx’s and Lucacs’ theory of

¹⁶ Cf. Hawkesworth (1989), (2006); Mendel (2007), etc.

¹⁷ Cf. Harding (1991).

proletariat. According to analogy with Marxist claim about the epistemic privilege of proletariat's standpoint over the core economic, sociologist and historical questions, different versions of feminist standpoint theories establish their claims of epistemic privilege of different features of women's social situation. Class, race, gender and sexuality necessarily structure and set limits to knower's understanding of reality and, therefore, inform all knowledge claims. Although there are *different* standpoint epistemologies, they all claim that certain positions produce 'less false', 'better', even 'correct' and 'true' understanding of the world. Precisely because there are so many different feminist standpoint approaches to epistemological problems, I will not cover all of them or try to give a comprehensive account of feminist standpoint theories, but instead I will focus on one feminist epistemologist, her version of standpoint theory and critique of Foucault's views – on the work of feminist political theorist Nancy Hartsock, who is usually described as “a leading feminist critic” (Sawicki, 1996: 162) of postmodernism.

The third position in feminist epistemology that Harding introduced in 1986 is the position of so-called feminist postmodernism, which emerged within this field as a *critique* of feminist standpoint theories. This strand of feminist epistemology takes

the perspectivism intimated by standpoint epistemologies to its logical conclusion ... [and] use[s] the 'situatedness' of each finite observer in particular sociopolitical, historical context to challenge the plausibility of claims that any perspective on the world could escape partiality (Hawkesworth, 1989: 536-537).

¹⁸ The leading representatives of feminist empiricism are Helen Longino and Lynn Nelson. Cf. Longino (1990), (1993); Nelson (1993), (2000).

As these theorists cannot be seen as a monolith group as well, I will focus primarily on several authors who react to Harstock's theory and critique of Foucault's usefulness for feminism, such as Susan Hekman, Jane Flax and Jana Sawicki.

Thorough this thesis, the term 'epistemology' will not be used primarily to refer to epistemology as philosophical discipline. Epistemology as *philosophical* discipline has suffered various attacks on its autonomy since the second half of the twentieth century. Even so-called standard definition of knowledge has been called into question, so there is no consensus among epistemologists themselves about how to *define* its central concept – the concept of knowledge.

Since the Cartesian project has been widely abandoned in the mainstream epistemology and by postmodern thinkers and feminists as well, I believe that it is possible to *redefine* epistemology and not to pronounce its death. We do not have to treat epistemology as Descartes' creation or as "the study of knowledge acquisition that was accomplished through the opposition of a knowing subject and a known object" (Hekman, 1990: 9), which is the Enlightenment version of its definition. We are not obliged to follow Descartes' and other Enlightenment philosophers' recommendation that epistemology should be kept at a safe distance from political, social and cultural influences. Therefore, on one side, epistemology should not be understood any more as a "foundationalist, anti-skeptical project. ... [E]pistemology [should be understood] as the theorizing about knowledge" (Alcoff, 2008: 4) in general. However, on the other side, and for this paper even more important, epistemology should be seen as inseparable from politics. There are

not epistemological inquiries that are not at the same time political, and precisely that is the claim made by both Foucault and feminist epistemologists.

2 FOUCAULT AND EPISTEMOLOGY

This chapter provides a general overview of Foucault's account of epistemological problems during his 'middle' period or in genealogical works. First, I argue that Foucault deals with epistemological problems and that genealogy can be seen as epistemology, and then I focus on the central concepts of his genealogical works: the concepts of power, knowledge, their relationship and on exploration how knowledges can be seen as resistance through Foucault's idea of 'subjugated knowledges'. All the topics for this chapter are chosen not only because they are the central topics of Foucault's work but because feminist epistemologists react, use, criticize or reject them as well.

2.1 Foucault As an 'Epistemologist'?

Foucault was interested in questions about knowledge and science from his earliest works. However, his name and ideas as well as names and ideas of feminist epistemologists are usually not included in discussions about problems within epistemology as a philosophical discipline. Like many other continental thinkers, Foucault is not even considered as a 'philosopher' because, allegedly, he does have "nothing to say" about "philosophical theories of truth and knowledge" (Prado, 2000: 2).¹⁹ Richard Rorty tells us that "a distinguished analytic philosopher ... urged that 'intellectual hygiene' requires one not to read ... Foucault" (Rorty, 1982: 224). Or, as Linda Alcoff notes, Foucault is "often read as [someone who tries] to deconstruct epistemology by undermining its principal questions and founding premises" (Alcoff,

¹⁹ Prado here actually quotes the essay by Robert Nola "Postmodernism, A French Cultural Chernobyl: Foucault on Power/Knowledge" published in *Inquiry*, 37 (1) in 1994.

2008: 115). In addition, Hilary Putnam, another analytic philosopher, although he considers Foucault as a “distinguished continental philosopher”, argues that in Foucault’s philosophy beliefs are “mainly determined by unreason and selfish power” (Putnam, 1981: ix, 162). Therefore, it seems that Foucault is ‘outside the language game of epistemology’. But, this is not all, because for many continental philosophers, “Foucault represents such a radical rupture with epistemology that we cannot interrogate his own claims about knowledge in terms of traditional epistemological questions without distorting his project” (Alcoff, 2008: 116).

It seems that we have here a rare example of a consensus among mainstream and continental philosophers and some feminists²⁰, because they mostly agree that Foucault is not an epistemologist. Even Foucault himself would probably agree with his critics and sympathizers when they say that he does not do epistemology, if ‘doing epistemology’ means providing a ‘theory’ of knowledge, offering an account of necessary and sufficient reasons for knowledge, etc.²¹ And, he has a very simple explanation for that: “I’m not an analytical philosopher. Nobody’s perfect” (Foucault, 1997: 176). Moreover, Foucault himself usually is not very helpful regarding his place within the field of philosophy in general and epistemology in particular. Sometimes, he is even satisfied with the description of his work given by his critics as ‘non-philosophical’, but in other situations he is more explicit and helpful regarding how himself sees his own position in philosophy and epistemology. For example, in an essay he wrote about himself for the *Dictionnaire des philosophes* under the pseudonym Maurice Florence, Foucault explicitly

²⁰ Cf. Mendel (2007).

says that “to the extent that Foucault fits into the philosophical tradition, it is the critical tradition of Kant, and his project could be called a Critical History of Thought” (Foucault, 1998c: 459). However, Foucault’s and Kant’s projects are very different. Kant, awakened from the dogmatic sleep by Hume, tried to *save* philosophy and epistemology from skepticism. He introduced the pure forms of knowledge as *necessary* conditions of all our knowledge: although our cognitive abilities are limited, they also reveal necessary conditions of their exercise. For example, our sensual (perceptive) knowledge must be given within temporal and/or spatial conditions. Therefore, the Kantian model seeks what in apparently contingent is actually necessary. Foucault, on the other side, although part of ‘the critical tradition of Kant’, inverts his move and asks what in apparently necessary knowledge, that of modern human sciences, might be contingent. Therefore, Foucault accepts Kantian critical stance, but does not accept his foundationalism and transcendentalism: “Foucault’s critique examines claims of necessity with a view to undermine them by showing that they are merely historical contingencies” (Gutting, 2005: 59).

Foucault’s position within the field of philosophy is, as we will see later, similar to that of Nietzsche, who is the main influence for Foucault’s genealogical works:

Like Nietzsche, Foucault was a writer whose philosophical status was questionable. He was a bit outrageous. He did not produce arguments. ... He was not developing a theory of truth or rationality, but rather analyzing the relations of power and knowledge that underpin certain understandings of truth and rationality. Unlike Nietzsche, he was explicitly political (Sawicki, 1991: 5).

²¹ Cf. Faubion (1998b): xxiv.

Therefore, if someone is looking for *theories* or *arguments* in a standard sense in Foucault's work that is precisely what it will not be found there. However, this very fact does not exclude Foucault from the field of theorizing about the epistemological problems such as knowledge, subjectivity or rationality, nor it makes his work irrelevant for epistemological studies. What needs to be accepted is that Foucault thinks, writes and argues about these problems in a *different* way that is not unintelligible for epistemologists, and more importantly, Foucault's work provide probably one of the most direct and clearest critiques of Cartesian and Kantian legacy in epistemology. On the other hand, as I have claimed in the previous chapter, we do not have to treat epistemology as *the* philosophical discipline and as Descartes' creation, and we can redefine it. Therefore, Foucault is not an epistemologist in traditional sense, but he is epistemologist in a sense that he theorizes about epistemological problems and that he argues together with feminist epistemologists that epistemology and politics, knowledge and power, are connected and that that connection should be explored.

In Foucault's writings, both in 'archaeological' and 'genealogical' periods, many core notions of traditional epistemology, are challenged. Knowledge is not attributed to beliefs and/or sets of beliefs, and it is not the sum of justified true beliefs. Knowledge includes much more than that: the space where the subject stands as knower, and the field in which concepts are determined and statements are arranged.²² He is against the conception of knowledge as a *possession of truth*, and of the conception of the self as the

²² Cf. Alcoff (2008): 144.

unitary condition of cognition. He is also against the conception of the *truth* as an ultimate value, as evident to reasoned inquiry and as objective.

It is difficult and probably wrong to try to give a holistic account of epistemological problems in Foucault's writings because his work resists every attempt to be put in something unitary and totalizing, and also because he changed his views about a number of things in his work over the years including his views about epistemological problems.

At first, it looks like his works during the 1960s are the best candidates for an epistemological inquiry, and it is not surprising that when mainstream philosophers and epistemologists read Foucault at all, they usually read his 'archaeological' books,²³ and argue that he does not have epistemology.²⁴ During the 'archaeological' period, Foucault was interested in an epistemic context in which some bodies of knowledge became intelligible and authoritative in the field of human sciences as systems of knowledge. Archaeology tries to discover the rules of formation that dictate what elements and structures a discourse²⁵ must possess in order to be admitted in the field of knowledge during the certain historical period. Archaeology is a very detailed, descriptive and value-neutral inquiry onto disciplines, expert idioms and systems of knowledge and truth.²⁶

²³ Cf. Putnam (1981): 155, where it is claimed that *The Birth of the Clinic* is "perhaps Foucault's best book."

²⁴ Cf. Rorty (1986).

²⁵ 'Discourse' is Foucault's technical term that denotes an actually existing group of statements that belong to the same discursive formation, which means the same historically situated field of knowledge.

²⁶ Cf. Foucault (1972), Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982): part I, May (1993): ch.2, Rouse (1994), Prado (2000): ch.2, Alcoff (2008): ch.4, Kelly (2008): ch.1.

Archaeology is the description of systems of thought, with no attempt to explain changes from one system to another.

Although Dreyfus and Rabinow are probably right when they say that “[*t*]here is no pre- and post- archaeology or genealogy in Foucault” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 104), there are *at least* two important reasons why it is better to grasp Foucault’s critique of traditional epistemology in genealogical and not in archaeological works. After the events in May 1968, Foucault started to think more about the concept of *power*, which became the central concept of his genealogical works, and second, he at least in one essay described genealogy as an ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’, of subjugated knowers, which could be seen as close to feminist efforts to build and construct their own theories of knowledge as opposite and resistant to traditional masculinist ones. Despite the fact that “Foucault himself claims although he does not appear, in the archaeological texts, to be analyzing power, in retrospect, he sees all of his work contributing to outlining the intricate and highly variable forms of power in discursive and non-discursive practices” (Grosz, 1990: 81), the concept of power, and even the term ‘power’ is rarely used by Foucault in his early writings, and in *one* of his early books, namely *Madness and Civilization*, he uses power in a different meaning than he does in genealogical works – as silencing, repressive and forbidding power. Without intending to argue against Foucault’s retrospective ‘insight’ into his work during the 1960s, I will focus primarily, and based on two reasons provided above, on his genealogical method and work, where he *explicitly* develops an account of power which has very important

epistemological consequences that are the topics of various feminist epistemological critiques.

If we speak about knowledge, Foucault during the genealogical period never uses as examples of knowledge as simple common-sense beliefs or perceptions – for example, “Grass is green” – or some beliefs from natural sciences that are usual among traditional and conventional epistemologists. His examples come from ‘suspicious’ sciences, human and social sciences, sciences with low epistemic status, so the starting points for Foucault’s ‘epistemological’ inquiries are not common accepted beliefs, but the most controversial and complicated beliefs from the sciences of man. This makes his account of epistemological problems even more powerful because, “[i]t has the advantage of being closer to actual practices of knowledge production, and [it] contributes toward inchoate understanding of the complex relationships which in fact exist between knowledge, power and subjectivity” (Alcoff, 2008: 141).

Foucault is, therefore, primarily interested in understanding the production of knowledges and truths, in the plural, in their historical specificities. He wants to know how and why we think some things are true, and how and why we take some things as knowledge, and these questions make Foucault’s genealogical project not only different from what we are used to seeing in epistemological accounts, but also relevant for us today. Namely, his histories/genealogies are not meant to stay in history, and they are not histories for their own sake. They are histories of the present, with an aim to show how our knowledge standards have evolved, to explain their contingencies and to show that

there is nothing necessary or inevitable in our dogmatic attachments with the current regimes of truth and knowledge. Foucault criticizes the traditional epistemological paradigm so strong, that we can only compare his critique with that one provided by the philosophers of modern and the Enlightenment era against the Scholastic dogmatism and authoritarianism.²⁷

2.2 Genealogical Method: An Overview

This section is focused on a general overview of Foucault's method he called 'genealogy' and used during the period between 1971 and 1976. The term 'genealogy' Foucault takes from Nietzsche, and although he usually rejects all labels, he was quite satisfied with the description of his work as 'Nietzschean' and it can be said that his 'epistemology' developed during this period is Nietzschean as well. On the other hand, because he was often criticized by some 'experts' because of his using of Nietzsche's ideas and work in 'un-Nietzschean' way, Foucault explicitly explains his relation to Nietzsche and his work:

It was Nietzsche who specified the power relations as the general forms ... of philosophical discourse. ... Nietzsche is the philosopher of power, a philosopher who managed to think of power without having to confine himself within a political theory in order to do so. ... The only valid tribute to thought such as Nietzsche's is precisely to use it, to deform it, to make it groan and protest. And if commentators then say that I am being faithful or unfaithful to Nietzsche, that is of absolutely no interest (Foucault, 1980a: 53-54).

"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", published in 1971 is the first Foucault's essay written during so-called genealogical period. In that paper, Foucault explains genealogy as a new

²⁷ Cf. Alcoff (2008): 149.

method for historical inquiry, a method that is different from the methods used by traditional history.

In the essay, Foucault summarizes Nietzsche's own view of genealogy, so it is immediately clear that as historical methodologies, Nietzsche's and Foucault's genealogies are different. For Nietzsche, genealogy is tracing of descent (*Herkunft*) of an idea or practice contrary to the search of their origins – the analysis of descent reveals discontinuous nature of beginnings and explains how “separate events in unrelated domains ... have come to form the object of investigations” (May, 1993: 74-75). For Foucault, however, genealogy is “the history of the present” (Foucault, 1995: 31), which means that it begins with a diagnosis of the current situation, that it is a history that starts from the present day as diagnosis and as an intervention as well. Genealogy examines the emergence and development of the present rules, practices and institutions that claim authority over us. Therefore, the primary target of genealogy is not the past for its own sake, but to understand and evaluate the present, to make the past no longer present, to leave the past to the past, and to force us to live in the present. “It is only in the present that one can make changes. In order to be free, one needs to continually expose what remains alive of the past in the present and relegate it to the past. To be unaware of the past is to be trapped by it” (O'Farrell, 2005: 75). Therefore, for Foucault, genealogy presents “a transformation of history into totally different form of time” (Foucault, 1998a: 385); it “shortens its vision to those things nearest to it” (ibid.: 380).

Despite differences, Foucault's genealogy is Nietzschean. They share an idea of genealogy as a *critique* – genealogy is a critique of the efforts to support established authorities on the basis of their *origin (Ursprung)*. Traditional history is a project devoted to seeking for 'origins' of things, discourses, and practices. According to Foucault, this search for origin tries to capture *the exact essence* of things, because it assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accidents and succession. This search assumes and is directed to that which is *already* there. Contrary to traditional history, genealogy is an 'effective history', which means history that does not unify, but "distinguishes, separates, and disperses" (ibid.: 380); a history that is opposed to the search for origins, or ahistorical foundations, metaphysical essences and unchangeable truth. Genealogy is a history without constants, because contrary to the Cartesian tradition, it assumes that nothing in 'man' is sufficiently stable enough to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding others or the world. For genealogist, there are no fixed essences, no underlying unchangeable laws. Genealogy reveals "the secret that [things] have no essences, or that their essence is fabricated" (Foucault, 1998a: 371). Where others (i.e. traditional historians) see continuities, origins and depth, the genealogist sees discontinuities, surfaces of events, small details and minor shifts. The genealogist writes the effective history that is opposed to a suprahistorical perspective that tries to *totalize* history and to make us comfortable with our past, which in turn offers and assurance of an end toward which the history moves. Genealogy is therefore seen by Foucault in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" as "curative science" (ibid.: 382), science that will help us to stop looking for origins, for ultimate truth, for essences

behind things that would give them a proper and definite meaning once and for all time. For genealogist, everything is in historical motion and in the process of change.

Foucault's genealogy can also be seen as Nietzschean through insistence on the connection between power and knowledge, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Nietzsche, for example, understands knowledge as a part of the struggle between forces for domination. As a result of that struggle they form shifting unities, and when knowledge changes (or that what we call the truth), that change happens not because of progress or new discoveries, but because of the shift of forces with the result of a new appropriation of knowledge and new interpretations which are now 'true'.²⁸ While Foucault does not understand knowledge as a part of a struggle between forces, he shares Nietzsche's insight that knowledge is not outside of struggle and conflict; it is not at the safe distance from struggle from which it can pronounce the truth of the conflict. There is no 'outside' of history, there is no neutral point from which is possible to observe and proclaim the truth of various knowledge claims. Knowledge for both Nietzsche and Foucault is not disinterested and objective observation but a weapon: "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (ibid.: 380).

For Foucault, the changes in knowledge are not themselves the result and product of thought itself. When knowledge changes the causes are the social forces that control behavior of individuals. Although Foucault, as we will see later, does not reduce knowledge to power, he is explicit that knowing is not the process that can achieve a total

²⁸ Cf. May (1993): 76.

escape from power relations, and that power has not only constraining role, and does not operate only by eliminating some knowledge; it also has a positive epistemic role in producing knowledges, subjects and objects of knowledges and truths.

Throughout Foucault's genealogical period, he was influenced by Nietzsche's idea of looking for power behind accepted and dominant knowledges, sciences, religions and other authorities, which usually present themselves as grounded in disinterested evidence and argument. For the genealogist, "everything is potentially enmeshed in the networks of power which ... are increasingly concerned with the advance of knowledge. We are now at the verge of sacrificing ourselves to our own deepest lie: our belief that knowledge exists separately from power" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 114).

From the earliest essay about genealogy, Foucault sees this method much more as an activity than a theory in the interpretative sense, "[because] it takes up a posture of subversion toward fixed meaning claims" (Ferguson, 1991: 324). He sees genealogy as counter-ontology, because it denies that there is any order 'out there' to be discovered: "genealogy aims to shake up the orderness of things" (ibid.: 333), to shake up our reliance on the regularity of things and to open the space for discontinuities, misfits and differences to be. Moreover, and for my purposes most important, genealogy gives new accounts of power, knowledge and their relationship:

Foucault owes us a radically new interpretation of both power and knowledge: one that does not see power as a possession that one group holds and another lacks; one that does not see knowledge as objective or subjective, but as a central component in the historical transformation of various regimes of power and truth. This, of course, is exactly what genealogy attempts to provide (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982:117).

In the next sections of this chapter, I will focus on Foucault's concepts of power and knowledge, on their relationship and on the idea of genealogy and knowledge as resistance.

2.3 Power

Foucault does not provide a 'theory' of power. He does not offer a 'theory' of knowledge either. He usually speaks about what power is not, rather than providing a positive account of it. In that way, Foucault tries to show how his ideas on power *differ* from other proposed accounts, especially those given by liberal theorists and Marxists. These differences are important to emphasize and understand not only for situating Foucault's 'analytics of power', but also because some of these differences are crucial for feminist critiques of Foucault's views and their epistemological and political consequences.

Foucault distances himself from liberal and Marxist accounts of power. Both liberals and Marxists operate with a so-called "juridico-discursive" (Foucault, 1990: 82) model of power that assumes that power is *possessed* (by pre-social individual, or by class, or by people, etc.); that power is *centralized* (in a law, or in economy, or in the state, etc.); and that power is primarily *repressive*. According to 'juridico-discursive' model of power, power is essentially *negative* – it produces nothing but "limit and lack" (ibid.: 83). Power is everywhere the *same* – it operates by endlessly reproduced mechanisms of law and censorship. Power is, finally, *domination* – all it can do is to forbid and command the obedience.

For the liberal tradition, the *site* of power is the state, which through laws and social practices they involve institutionalizes what is acceptable and unacceptable within the certain community/state. Law appears as a mechanism of power as prohibition. For Marxists, power is the exercise of repression by the state, an ability of the ruling class to ensure the exploitation of surplus value of the production's process that the capitalists keep for themselves. Although liberals and Marxists do not have the same or even similar political and economic goals, they both consider power as negative and restrictive upon the subjects. Precisely because power is negative and restrictive, it leaves space for potentially disobedient subjectivity, and that is the reason why the state and its power manifested through laws is important for both, liberals and Marxists.²⁹ After the events in 1968, Foucault started explicitly to challenge this conception of power as negative and prohibitive, and to consider that account as too narrow and one-dimensional. In the interview he gave in 1977, published under the title "Truth and Power", Foucault explains the problem he sees in negative conception of power:

[I]t seems to me now that the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power. In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us a force that says no, but it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault, 1980c: 119).

²⁹ For a more detailed account of liberal and Marxists' conceptions of power, cf. Foucault (1980c): 109-133, and May (1993): 35-38 for differences between liberals, Marxists and

Foucault does not deny the ‘negative’ side of power, but believes that it is precisely that – one side, and therefore not a complete picture: we cannot understand power fully and completely if we understand it as negative and as it only says ‘no’.

Negative conceptions of power have direct implications for how some important epistemological questions are understood. For example, the Cartesian legacy and liberal conception of power as negative result in very specific conceptions of knowledge and a knower in Western epistemology. Traditional epistemology does not accept knowledge as a political event. If something is true knowledge, it has to be dissociated from power; it can appear only in isolated, free space of (meditating) subjectivity. This is the reason why Foucault in “Prison Talk” says that it is generally accepted that “[p]ower makes men mad, and those who govern are blind; only those who keep their distance from power, who are in no way implicated in tyranny, shut up in their Cartesian *poêle*, their room, their meditations, only those can discover truth” (Foucault, 1980a: 51).

Unlike liberals, Marxists do think that knowledge is political, and they even distinguish two sorts of knowledge. First one is ‘scientific’ and ‘true’ knowledge that is in accordance with dialectical understanding of history. The second is ideology, or distorted knowledge that is useless except for the ruling class, and therefore false. However, Marxists identify truth with liberation and falsity (ideology) with subjection³⁰, which

Foucault.

³⁰ It is important to emphasize that these Marxist assumptions are shared by feminist standpoint theorists, as we will see in the next chapter.

means that both liberals and Marxists believe in *one, objective, pure truth* and do not approve a political critique of it.³¹

Foucault is very critical about the Marxist concept of ‘ideology’. As we have seen, first, ideology is defined through its opposition to science and truth – ideology is a distortion of knowledge and truth, a falsehood. This distinction allows Marxists to perceive knowledge and truth as outside power and as ‘objective’, and to focus on power relations that are connected with ideology, to criticize them, while the ‘real’ knowledge and truth stay beyond political critique.

Second, the concept of ideology assumes the existence of a *subject* whose access to knowledge and truth has been obscured. This subject (of knowledge) does not have to be pre-given or natural, but because of inevitability of ideology, the subject is considered as “permanent and eternal. It is simply the *details* of this subject that are considered historically variable instead of its very form” (Grosz, 1990: 83; emphasis added). In addition, ‘ideology’ assumes that there are unchanging *objects* (i.e. true ‘reality’) in the world that wait to be discovered by this universal knowing subject.

Third, ideology is secondary to an economic order and relations, because all non-economic relations function in the interests of economic within the Marxist framework. Therefore, ideology is only the effect of the economic level.

³¹ Cf. May (1993): 38.

Contra Marxists, Foucault argues that power is much more effective when it uses knowledges and truths, not only ideologies and falsity. In addition, he also, contra Marxists does not want to reduce power to repression, because that form of power, although existent is not the typical or usual way the power operates – it is only the extreme or the ‘terminal’ form of power.³²

The genealogical period in Foucault’s work brings new conception of power and subsequently new conception of knowledge. Regarding power, and in opposition to Marxists and liberals, or to be more precise, opposite to ‘juridico-discursive’ model of power, Foucault claims:

The exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others. Which is to say, of course, that something called Power, with or without a capital letter, which is assumed to exist universally in concentrated or diffused form, does not exist. Power exists only when it is put into action, even if, of course, it is integrated into a disparate field of possibilities brought to bear upon permanent structures. This also means that power is not a function of consent. In itself, it is not a renunciation of freedom, a transference of rights, the power of each and all delegated to a few (Foucault, 1982: 219-220).

Although Foucault does not provide an alternative theory of power to those of Marxists and liberals, he does provide some principles of analyzing power relations, which he does not change during the whole genealogical period. These principles are usually expressed in a negative way, but they are clear enough not only for differentiation of Foucault’s and positions he is critical about, but to realize important epistemological consequences of his account.

³² Cf. Foucault (1990): 92, Grosz (1990), Sawicki (1991).

Foucault is aware that the use of the word 'power' with all 'baggage' and 'burden' of its traditional use is not without potential dangers: "the word *power* is apt to lead to a number of misunderstandings – misunderstandings with respect to its nature, its form, its unity" (Foucault, 1990: 92). However, despite these possible and actual misunderstandings, Foucault suggests the following principles in analyzing power relations.

First, power is *not* a thing, which means that it is not an entity, a capacity, a quality, commodity, or anything that can be acquired, seized, shared, owned or possessed. Contra liberals, Marxists and many feminists who see power as something that some individuals or groups have or possess while others do not, Foucault claims that power exists only in actions and only when it is in play. "[P]ower is *exercised* from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (ibid.: 94; emphasis added). Therefore, power according to Foucault cannot be equated with social structures, such as patriarchy or capitalism, nor with social practices and institutions.

Second, power is *not* primarily repressive, but *productive*. It generates, creates particular types of knowledge and cultural order. Power as productive force, creates and produces its objects and knowing subjects that are not any more, as in traditional epistemology, opposite but *effects* of power. Therefore, the modern (mediating) subject is now seen as historical and not natural or transcendental entity, and it is *produced* and *created* by the ways power is exercised. There is no secret place in the subject, a foundation, the reserve untouchable to power relations that can be truly expressed in 'objective' process of

knowing or in grasping of the ‘real’, pure truth, or that can be liberated in the name of real and true freedom. Power relations are immanent, not external to other types of relationships – economic, knowledge relationships, social relations, etc.: “relations of power ... have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play” (Foucault, *ibid.*).

Third, power comes from below, or it should be analyzed as coming from the bottom-up. Contrary to Marxists, who focus on power as a possession, that also comes from above, which leads them to locate power in the centralized source, such as class, and to analyze it from the top-down, Foucault argues that that view of power obscures the entire network of power relations. Power does not have a single source, but it is based on a network of numerous of local, interconnected, micro-level relations operating in society. Bottom-up analysis can also show how power relations at the micro-level of society make possible the existence of macro-level relations of power and domination such as the state, class power and patriarchy.

Fourth, power is dependent on *resistance*: “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1990: 95). The relational nature of power depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: if there is a relation of power, there is a possibility of resistance, which means for Foucault that we are never trapped by power – it is always possible to modify its hold. On the other hand, Foucault in his later writings also emphasizes that power relations can be implemented only where there is a possibility of resistance, which

means in cases where there is a struggle, a conflict, a dynamical relationship between different actions with the possibility of different outcomes. There are no power relationships where there is no possibility of resistance and modification of current temporary alignments of local forms of power.

Fifth, power is *omnipresent*. It is

everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. ... One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is a name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (ibid.: 93).

Although power is everywhere, it is distributed or it runs *unevenly* through institutions, practices, ideologies, truths, knowledges, discourses, in short, through all social formations, so nothing is *outside* its grasp. Power is not exterior to knowledge contrary to whole epistemological tradition, but it is the condition of its existence. The whole social field is a battlefield, a field of struggle, consisted of myriad unstable and heterogeneous relations of power.

Sixth, power is intentional, which means that it has goals, aims and objectives. However, because of the instability of and the ever-changing nature of power relations, because of the always present possibility of resistance at every level and everywhere, power can never be completely successful in achieving its goals and objectives. Power relations are both *intentional* and *non-subjective*, which means that although there are some goals, they cannot be explained by or reduced on the goals of particular agents.

To sum up, genealogy sees power as productive and creative network of relations of forces that produce and shape knowledges and objects of knowledge, and that utilize the effects of knowledges. But what is then knowledge?

2.4. The Concept of Knowledge

By the beginning of the 1970s, or in the genealogical period, Foucault adopted Nietzsche's view that knowledge itself is a product of struggles for power and domination. Although he rarely speaks about the concept of knowledge generally and about its general role in genealogical works, we can say that in the first 'methodological' lecture of the series Foucault gave in May 1973 at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, published under the title "Truth and Juridical Forms",³³ his aim is precisely to explain on a more general level the concepts of knowledge and the subject of knowledge, but at the same time as different than they are conceived in traditional philosophy and epistemology:

Two or three centuries ago, Western philosophy postulated, explicitly or implicitly, the subject as the foundation, as the central core of all knowledge, as that in which and on the basis of which freedom revealed itself and truth could blossom. ... [I]n the field of what we may call the 'theory of knowledge', or in that of epistemology, ... it seems to me that the theory of the subject has remained very philosophical, very Cartesian and Kantian (Foucault, 2000: 3).

So, today when someone tries to do the history of, for example, knowledge, he or she "sticks to this subject of knowledge, to the subject of representation as the point of origin from which knowledge is possible and truth appears" (ibid.).

³³ This series of lectures, except the first, methodological one that will be discussed here, presents Foucault's work on the book *Discipline and Punish*, which was published in 1975.

Foucault's project is to do something completely different. Using his genealogical method, he wants to see how a subject come to be *constituted* that is not definitively given, how the subject constitutes itself *within*, not outside history and how subject is constantly established and reestablished by history as different and variable. In order to do that, he needs to do something else first: to investigate the concept of knowledge.

In his methodological reflections about the concept of knowledge, Foucault needs "to cite only one name, that of Nietzsche" (ibid: 5), because Nietzsche gives an historical account of the subject, of the birth of the certain type of knowledge, and at the same time he does not grant the preexistence of a subject of knowledge as traditional epistemology does.

Foucault finds the source for the new reconception of knowledge in one of Nietzsche's early essays, "On Truth and the Lie in an Extra-moral Sense", written in 1873 and published after his death. At the very beginning of the essay Nietzsche says: "In some remote corner of the universe, bathed in the fires of innumerable solar systems, there once was a planet where clever animals invented knowledge" (Nietzsche, 1976: 42).³⁴

The central Nietzsche's thesis that is important for Foucault, is that knowledge is an *invention*, that knowledge was invented on one star or planet in one particular moment by intelligent animals. The word Nietzsche uses for 'invention' is the German word

³⁴ Cf. Foucault (2000): 6.

‘*Erfindung*’, and that word is used as an opposite to another word, the word that already appeared in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, word for ‘origin’ – ‘*Ursprung*’.

Invention is on the one side a break, but on the other it is something with a small beginning – low, mean, unavowable, and Foucault wants to counterpose these small and low beginnings of fabrications to the solemnity of origins.

To say that [knowledge] was invented is to say that it has no origin. More precisely, it is to say, however paradoxical this may be, that knowledge is absolutely not inscribed in human nature. Knowledge doesn’t constitute man’s oldest instinct; and, conversely, in human behavior, the human appetite, the human instinct, there is no such thing as a seed of knowledge (ibid: 7-8).

At this point, Foucault detaches himself from philosophical/epistemological tradition in a very radical way. First, Foucault does not start his reflections about knowledge, as the most of traditional philosophers would do. He does not start with, for example, the opening lines of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* that mark the whole western epistemological tradition: “ALL men by nature desire to know” (Aristotle, 2005: 7). Instead, Foucault quotes the opening lines of an essay written by a ‘suspicious’ figure in the history of philosophy, Nietzsche, who not surprisingly, just like Foucault, “though a professor, was a literary rather than an academic philosopher, ... [who] invented no new technical theories in ontology or epistemology” (Russell, 1961: 760).³⁵ Second, he claims, contrary to the whole tradition starting with Plato and Aristotle, that knowledge “is absolutely not inscribed in human nature”.

³⁵ Cf. Prado (2000): 6.

Knowledge has connections with instincts, but it cannot be present in them, and it is not one instinct among the others. Knowledge has a basis in instincts, but the basis is the *confrontation*, struggle, between instincts.

Knowledge is simply the outcome of the interplay, the encounter, the junction, the struggle, and the compromise between instincts. Something is produced because the instincts meet, fight one another, and at the end of their battles finally reach a compromise. That something is knowledge (Foucault, 2000: 8).

Knowledge “is produced by the mechanisms or realities that are of complete different nature. ... It is ... like ‘a spark between two swords’, but not a thing made of their metal” (ibid.). Knowledge arises as an outcome of a combat, and it is “not instinctive, it is counterinstinctive; just as it is not natural, but counternatural” (ibid.). And this is the first sense in which Foucault speaks about knowledge as an ‘invention’, and not as something that is derived from human nature.

There is a second meaning of ‘knowledge as an invention’. Namely, knowledge “isn’t even closely connected to the world to be known” (ibid.). In other words, the *novelty* of knowledge means that knowledge is not just an expression of our experience of things in the world. There is no resemblance or prior affinity between knowledge and things to be known. Therefore, Foucault claims: “In ... strictly Kantian terms, one should say the conditions of experience and the conditions of the object of experience are completely heterogeneous” (ibid: 9).

Knowledge is an attempt to *impose* the order in a chaotic world. It is not only the attempt to describe things in the world, because knowledge, opposite to certain strands in

traditional epistemology, is not a description.³⁶ “Knowledge can only be a violation of the things to be known, and not a perception, a recognition, an identification of or with those things” (ibid.). What knowledge does is imposing on things in the world “an order which is new” (Kelly, 2008: 20), and the relation between knowledge and things to be known is *never* merely representational,³⁷ because there is no relation of continuity between knowledge and things to be known, but the relations of power and struggle, which mean that we do not have to postulate (like Descartes had to) the existence of God, who traditionally has guaranteed the continuity and harmony between knowledge and the things in the world. However, if there is not relation of continuity between knowledge and the instincts, but only discontinuity and power relations, “then it’s not God that disappears, but subject in its unity and sovereignty”. Since Descartes, “we see that the unity of the subject was ensured by unbroken continuity running from the desire to knowledge [*connaissance*], from the instinct to knowledge [*savoir*], from body to truth. All of that ensured the subject’s existence” (Foucault, 2000: 10). But, if the mechanisms of instincts and the play of desire are on a completely different level than knowledge is, we do not need to postulate the unity of human subject that has been traditionally given beforehand and definitively.

Therefore,

[a]t the center, at the root of knowledge Nietzsche places something like struggle, power relations. ... [And if] we truly want to know knowledge, to know what it is, to apprehend it at its roots, in its manufacture ... we need to understand what the relations of struggle and power are (ibid: 12).

³⁶ Cf. Kelly (2008): 19.

Contrary to the whole tradition starting with Descartes and Kant, Foucault follows Nietzsche who argues that there is no nature of knowledge, an essence of knowledge and of the universal conditions of knowledge.

[K]nowledge is always the historical and circumstantial result of conditions outside the domain of knowledge. In reality knowledge is an event that falls under the category or activity. Knowledge is not a faculty or a universal structure. ...
 [K]nowledge ... only belongs to the order of results, events, effects (ibid: 13-14).

This Nietzschean view of knowledge as a product, result and effect of struggles for power that Foucault adopts has important consequences for the understanding of the 'subject' of knowledge. Foucault is, as we have seen, does not understand subject as universal, timeless, abstract and transcendental, which is at the source of how one makes sense of the world, and which is the foundation of all knowledge, thought and action. For Foucault, the subject of knowledge/knower traditional epistemology speaks about does not exist in his/her autonomy and universality. Foucault explicitly rejects the subject of the Enlightenment understood as an *a priori* subject of knowledge: "What I refused was precisely that you first of all set up a theory of the subject. ... What I wanted to know was how the subject constituted himself in such and such determinate form."³⁸ The subject is an effect, the product of specific power and knowledge constellation. That subject is not prior the history, and not pre-given. It is created and changed by outside events; it is constantly dissolved and recreated in different configurations along with other forms of knowledge and social practices.³⁹ This conception of the subject of

³⁷ This view is opposite to the whole tradition of representational theory of knowledge and mind that has started with Descartes and Locke, and is still influential among some analytic philosophers.

³⁸ Foucault quoted in McLaren (1997): 112.

³⁹ Cf. O'Farrell (2005): 110-113.

knowledge as an effect of power and knowledge constellations, or this dismissal of the traditional knower as one of the central epistemological categories is probably the most radical of Foucault's epistemological move in his genealogical works. To put it simply, epistemology is not based on the concept of the knower, and knowledge does not have a cause in independently existing knower opposite to the world and the other knowers. The way the knower or the subject of knowledge exists in Foucault's genealogical works much more looks like the object than the traditional subject.

2.5 Knowledge and Power

The picture of genealogy of knowledge that Foucault provides is more than problematic for both, Foucault's critics and opponents, and for his sympathizers. Allegedly, according to the picture of genealogy of knowledge, Foucault reduces knowledge to struggle and play of forces, or to be more specific, he reduces knowledge to, or identifies knowledge with power.

Foucault's scholars, in an effort to defend him from accusations that the only operative force in his account of genealogy of knowledge is power, often quote the famous passage from *Discipline and Punish*, as the clearest Foucault's general account of relationship between power and knowledge, although he tried on various occasions, especially in interviews he gave, to defend himself from the accusation for the reduction of knowledge to power or for identification between them. In one of those interviews, Foucault explicitly says:

[W]hen I read – and I know it was being attributed to me – the thesis 'Knowledge is power' or 'Power is knowledge', I begin to laugh, since studying their *relation* is

precisely my problem. If they were identical, I would not have to study them and I would be spared a lot of fatigue as a result. The very fact that I pose the question of their relation proves clearly that I do not *identify* them (Foucault, 1998b: 455).

However, this is not understood as ‘enough’ or as sufficient explanation by many Foucault’s critics⁴⁰, and therefore, it is urgent to explore Foucault’s general account of the *relation* between knowledge and power he gave in *Discipline and Punish*:

Perhaps, ... we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands, and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. These ‘power-knowledge relations’ are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge (Foucault, 1995: 27-28).

Foucault here speaks about knowledge and power as, on the one side, heterogeneous, but on the other, as those, which mutually reinforce each other. Power provides the site for the elaboration of knowledge, and knowledge itself has a constituting effect on power relations in, for example, establishing or reinforcing the hierarchies of epistemic authority. The passage also speaks about differences between the traditional view on knowledge and power and the genealogical view. In traditional accounts, knowledge is

⁴⁰ Those critics are different philosophers and political scientists from Richard Rorty to Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor.

possible only in the absence of power relations, and the subject of knowledge comes first, or as Foucault says, traditional accounts, including liberal and Marxist, are based on “the underlying idea that relations of force, economic conditions, and social relations ... are imposed on the subject of knowledge that remains identical” (Foucault, 2000: 15). Genealogical view, on the other hand, offers the picture of knowledge that is a product of power-knowledge relations, and the picture of the subject of knowledge that comes later as a product, as an effect, and not as a source or a cause of power-knowledge relationships.⁴¹

Knowledge and power are both part of the

system that creates the conditions for the production and authorization of new knowledges, modes of knowing and objects of inquiry. Neither knowledge nor power can be reduced to or replaced with the other in discursive analysis. ... [K]nowledge has no autonomous existence apart from power (Alcoff, 2008: 153).

Therefore, Foucault speaks about reciprocal, interconnected and interdependent relation of power and knowledge, and he does not claim that epistemology should disappear or be reduced to political analysis. He claims that there cannot be an epistemological analysis that is autonomous and separated from political analysis.

2.6 Knowledge As Resistance

This concluding section of this chapter is primarily devoted to exploration of the possibility that knowledge/knowledges can serve or be a form of resistance. Although Foucault ‘defines’ power as depending on resistance, and although he claims that power

⁴¹ Cf. May (1993): 72, Alcoff (2008): 153.

always implies resistance, resistance is the concept that is underdeveloped in Foucault's work.⁴² However, in the lecture Foucault gave in 1976,⁴³ he explicitly speaks about 'subjugated knowledges' and their potential to be forms of resistance to dominant knowledge/ knowledges, and about genealogy as a method of resistance. On the other hand, it can be argued that genealogy from its earliest formulations was seen as resistance by Foucault, because he introduced genealogical *critique* as different and opposed method to the traditional history and revolutionary theory. From its very beginning, genealogy is an attempt to show that there is no theory of global transformation and no revolutionary (universal) subject whose interests the theory can represent.

Although Foucault in many of his interviews tries to clarify his view as the concept of resistance, I argue that the first lecture in the series of *Society Must Be Defended* is of great epistemological importance, because there we can see in the most precise way how knowledge/knowledges can be seen as tools of resistance.

According to Foucault, a genealogy of knowledges explains the *struggle* of one knowledge or *episteme*⁴⁴ against other knowledges or *epistemes*. The epistemologically

⁴² Cf. McLaren (1997): 123.

⁴³ That is the lecture Foucault gave on January 7th 1976, which was initially published in English together with the second one (given on January 14th) under the title "Two lectures" (cf. Foucault, 1980b). At that moment, the whole series of lectures was not published in French, and the English translation from 1980 was actually a translation from Italian transcription of those two lectures. That is the main reason why I have decided to follow the English translation from the French that appeared in 2003 as *Society Must Be Defended* (cf. Foucault, 2003).

⁴⁴ *Episteme* is a technical term Foucault introduced in his archaeological works. He explains in one of his interviews:

important thing here is that what we currently call ‘knowledge’ is actually one knowledge, the dominant one, the knowledge that in a struggle defeated other knowledges. On the other hand, genealogy as a method is designed to facilitate “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 2003: 7). Under the term ‘subjugated knowledges’, Foucault means two things. First, the term refers to “blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and scientific ensembles, but which were masked” (ibid.). The genealogist, then, reactivates them and reveals their existence. Second, and more importantly, the term refers to

a whole series of knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity. ... [T]he knowledge of the psychiatrized, the patient, the nurse, the doctor, that is parallel to, marginal to, medical knowledge, the knowledge of the delinquent, ... [knowledge of] what people know (and this is by no means the same thing as common knowledge or common sense but, on the contrary, a particular knowledge, a knowledge that is local, regional, or differential, incapable of unanimity and which derives its power solely from the fact that it is different from all knowledges that surround it), ... at a local level, ... disqualified knowledges (ibid: 7-8).

Therefore, genealogy uses history to give a *voice* to the marginal and submerged knowledges that are ‘a little beneath history’. Foucault wants to show that some paths in the history were not taken and that are a numerous unactualized possibilities and events that do not fit the dominant functionalist schema of knowledge and science.

I would like to define *episteme* ... as the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won’t say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The *episteme* is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from false, but of what may from what may not be characterized as scientific (Foucault, 1980d: 197).

It could be argued that, to the some extent, *episteme* is similar to Kuhnian *paradigm*.

Genealogy is about the insurrection or rebellion of knowledges not against the scientific methods, concepts or content, but against “the centralizing power-effects that are bound up with the institutionalization and workings of any scientific discourse organized in a society such as ours” (ibid: 9).⁴⁵ This means that when something is claimed to be a ‘science’ or something has an aspiration to be a ‘science’, Foucault in that claim or aspiration does not see the rational structure of that potential ‘science’, or that its propositions are rationally verified. On the contrary, he sees in that kind of claim or aspiration an attempt to *disqualify* some other knowledges, to *attach* itself to scientific discourse, and to assign to those who speak that discourse “the power-effects that the West has, since the Middle Ages, ascribed to a science and reserved for those who speak scientific discourse” (ibid: 10).

Genealogy, as a method, is therefore, an “attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words, to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse. The project of these disorderly and tattered genealogies is to reactivate local knowledges ... against the scientific hierarchicalization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects” (ibid.).

Why is Foucault’s idea of genealogy as the insurrection of subjugated, oppressed and local knowledges epistemologically relevant? First of all, Foucault’s account of knowledges in the plural, dissociates the concept of knowledge from the concept of truth. Traditionally speaking, knowledge cannot be knowledge if it is not true; there cannot be a

⁴⁵ By ‘society such as ours’ Foucault always thinks of the Western societies.

false knowledge⁴⁶. And the traditional belief that “We all agree that what we know is true”, in Foucault’s account of knowledges in the plural, of struggle between knowledges, and one’s ‘winning’, now dominant knowledge over the plethora of different and local knowledges, gains a completely new meaning. What ‘we all’ allegedly agree in our societies is that the one, dominant knowledge, or that we call ‘science’, is ‘true’, and that other oppressed, subjugated, local and naïve knowledges are ‘false’. They are false, not because they are ‘irrational’ or not in accordance with some ‘objective’ methods of inquiry (if there are such methods). They are false because they cannot fit into the mold of dominant scientific and epistemological discourse. Consequently, some of them in some other power relations could be true.

Second, subjugated or disqualified knowledges can subvert or undermine the supremacy of dominant and ‘hegemonic’ knowledge(s). But, this is still not enough for a radical epistemological critique. Namely, what Foucault sees in dominant, totalizing knowledges is that they can work or operate only if they exercise some kind of coercion and violence against local and particular knowledges, because they *need* to subsume them under their universal and totalizing structures.⁴⁷

On the other hand, Linda Alcoff sees Foucault’s account of subjugated knowledges as important because they are, according to her,

⁴⁶ It can be argued that not only in traditional accounts and definitions of knowledge, but in almost all contemporary definitions of knowledge, knowledge is always connected with truth.

⁴⁷ Cf. Alcoff, 2008: 154.

valorized not because they represent more accurate representation of the Real as it exists in itself, ... but because they do not require the amount of violence, distortion, and omission that global knowledges require. ... [In other words], they have a *different* relationship to power, and ... this different relationship will constitute a different field [of knowledge] (Alcoff, 2008: 155).

The structure or the form of subjugated and local knowledges is *different*, because they have a different position in relation to dominant systems of power. They are not local or subjugated because they have not reached domination yet, but because “they do not aspire to dominance. They do not construct competing unitary, formal, totalizing theoretical systems” (ibid: 156). Linda Alcoff, in her account of Foucault’s idea of ‘subjugated knowledges’ argues that the important distinction that should be made here is not that one between dominant and subjugated knowledges, which Foucault actually makes, but that one between *local* and ‘*hegemony-seeking*’⁴⁸ knowledges, because the second distinction allows us to make important differences that exist between so-called ‘subjugated knowledges’, and to open the possibility to think about epistemology in a new, productive, innovative ways.⁴⁹

First, although it can be argued that there is a large number of subjugated knowledges, including knowledges of, for example, Neo-Nazis groups, there is a criterion Foucault could use and according to which knowledges of those groups cannot be considered as a place for critical intervention. The main question/criterion is whether those kinds of ‘knowledges’ seek for disqualification and marginalization of other knowledges. In the case of Neo-Nazis groups, it is more than obvious that their knowledge seeks for

⁴⁸ In this distinction, Alcoff uses the Marxist term ‘hegemony’, which Foucault does not use.

domination, and requires, even includes the exercise of violence against the other knowledges and their disqualification.

The second question that should be addressed is: How Foucault can be sure that his critique does not lead toward the mere turning of the subjugated knowledge into the dominant position? Again, the distinction between local and ‘hegemony’-seeking knowledges can help: the mere reversal of knowledges will happen only in the case when the subjugated knowledge is a ‘hegemony’-seeking one. In the case when subjugated knowledge is not ‘hegemony’-seeking, there is a possibility of a new relation between knowledge and power, and for a new, different kind of knowledge than the one represented in ‘science’ or in dominant knowledge in our societies.

The important consequence of Foucault’s account of subjugated knowldges in the first lecture in *Society Must Be Defended*, is that knowledges, subjugated, local knowledges can be a form of a *resistance* to dominant knowledges and discourses. Precisely because subjugated knowledges are local and spatially/temporally situated, and precisely because they are *different* from the dominant ones, they are also ‘innovative’ and ‘creative’, and they can be a form of a resistance.⁵⁰

Through the account of subjugated or local knowledges, Foucault actually gives us the possibility to imagine a *different* kind of epistemology than the one represented in

⁴⁹ Cf. Alcoff (2008): 157

⁵⁰ For Foucault’s account of relationship between power and resistance, cf. Foucault (1990): 95-96.

traditional epistemological accounts, not as a solution for our current epistemological issues and theories that can replace or overturn the dominant paradigm as a better or more correct way of describing the world. Namely, what Foucault's general epistemological reflections show is that we should focus on *specific, local* and *particular*, because we cannot escape, despite all the efforts, our temporal, cultural, political, and local specificity and particularity. This leads some theorists, such as Linda Alcoff to claim that[t]he specificity and locatedness of epistemology ... is perhaps the most important distinction to be made between [Foucault's] conception of epistemology and traditional accounts (Alcoff, 2008:160).

Genealogical method, therefore, can be seen as epistemological, and it helps us in detaching ourselves from dogmatic transcendent epistemological formulations and creates the possibility for us to imagine a new, different epistemological project. "Providing [the genealogies] of present day 'absolute' truths will have a liberating effect, dislodging their power and thus freeing us to imagine new possibilities" (ibid: 119).

To sum up, Foucault in his genealogical period, under Nietzsche's influence, develops a radical critique of traditional epistemology and its core concepts of knowledge and subject of knowledge imagined as dissociated from everything political, local, social and culturally specific. He argues in favor of marginalized voices and knowledges, because he sees them as potential sources of resistance against dominant, totalizing knowledges that deny their situatedness and historical specificity, proclaiming themselves for

absolute and universal truths. All of these features of Foucault's 'epistemology' seem to be in accordance with feminist efforts to develop different epistemological accounts than the dominant masculinist ones, so it appears that there is a possibility of alliance between Foucault and feminists in their battle against traditional epistemology. However, as it will be shown in the next chapter, the relationship between feminists and Foucault is much more complex, and their possible alliance is more than suspicious for a number of feminist epistemologists. The next chapter will explore the main differences between feminist and Foucault's epistemological interests, and some feminist critiques of his work.

3 FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

This chapter is devoted to two strands of feminist epistemology: feminist standpoint theory and feminist ‘postmodernism’. In the first section I provide short and general overview of the position of feminist standpoint theorists, and then I focus on the theory developed by Nancy Hartsock. Her theory is examined to some details, which are necessary for understanding of important differences between her and Foucault’s ideas of power, the subject of knowledge and the role of ‘subjugated knowledges’. Her critique of Foucault is examined in the third section of this chapter. The last two sections are devoted to feminist critics of standpoint theory and especially of Hartsock’s interpretation of Foucault’s work and its usefulness for feminism.

3.1 Feminist Standpoint Epistemology: An Overview

It is difficult to argue about feminist standpoint epistemology generally because various feminist epistemologists such as Dorothy Smith, early (work of) Jane Flax, Patricia Hill Collins, Nancy Hartsock, Sandra Harding, Hilary Rose, Alison Jaggar, and many others are put under the heading ‘feminist standpoint theorists’. Some early sketches of what will become the standpoint theory in feminism can be found in the work of feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith as early as in 1974.⁵¹ However, the first feminist essay with a specific goal of developing “an important epistemological tool for understanding and opposing all forms of domination – a feminist standpoint” (Hartsock, 1987: 158) is the groundbreaking essay ‘The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a

⁵¹ Cf. Smith (1987).

Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism' written by Nancy Hartsock and published in 1983.⁵²

As a theoretical approach in feminist theory and within the field of feminist epistemology, 'feminist standpoint' appeared as a label in Harding's book from 1986 *The Science Question in Feminism*, as one of the three theoretical positions she recognized and defined. As Dorothy Smith, one of the authors subsumed under this label, explains: "Feminist standpoint theory, as a general class of theory, as a general class of theory in feminism, was brought into being by Sandra Harding. ... In a sense, Harding created us. ... As standpoint theorists, we became identifiable as a group through Harding's study" (Smith, 1997: 392).

Although Harding's classification of theoretical positions within the field of feminist epistemology has its merits, it produced overgeneralizations of theoretical options she identified as well, and as a result, it is hard to see important differences between authors and their theories that are put under one of the general headings. In order to escape the trap of overgeneralizations, I will use the term 'feminist standpoint theory' as an 'umbrella term' for different feminist epistemological accounts, which share *some* of the general features that are usually attached to *the* feminist standpoint theory, but not necessarily *all* of them.⁵³

⁵² Cf. Hartsock (1987).

Generally speaking, standpoint theories, feminist as well as non-feminist, claim to represent the world from a particular socially situated perspective that can lay claim to epistemic privilege or authority. Their roots or early formulations can be found in Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic from his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in Marx's and Marxist theory of epistemic privilege of proletariat over the crucial questions of economy, sociology and history. If we speak about feminist standpoint theories generally, we could see them as a type of critical theory with an aim to *empower* women to improve and overcome their current situation. As critical theories, they represent the social world in relation to the interests of the oppressed/women, who are the subject of the inquiry; they also provide an account of that world which enables the subjects/women to *understand* their problems; and, they provide an account of the world that is *useful* by the subjects/women to improve their situation.⁵⁴

It is necessary to understand that feminist standpoint theories *never* claim epistemic privilege of the oppressed/marginalized over the entire field of knowledge, and in all knowledge/scientific domains. What standpoint theories usually do is that they *limit* the scope of their claims: the goal is to provide knowledge that would be *useful* for the oppressed/marginalized groups in society to understand and overcome their problems. They also argue that the feminist standpoint is an *achievement*, a *project*, not an inheritance or a social given, and that therefore, it cannot be identified with whatever

⁵³ A superficial reading of works written by Smith, Hartsock, Collins and Harding, to name a few, will be enough to show that there are many difference between their theories.

⁵⁴ For a general account of feminist standpoint theories, cf. Anderson (2000), (2004); Harding (1986), (1991).

feminists or women actually think. The feminist standpoint is the result of the reflection upon women's experience and thinking of how to change the position of the marginalized through collective political action.⁵⁵ Therefore, feminist standpoint theory could be understood as "an interpretative framework dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power" (Collins, 1997: 375). That interpretative framework can be used in different ways, depending on different backgrounds and interests of feminist epistemologists, and because of that fact, in the next section I will focus on one feminist standpoint theory, which has been reformulated over the years and under the pressures of critiques, on the theory developed by Nancy Hartsock.

3.2 Feminist Standpoint and Nancy Hartsock

I have decided to examine the work of Nancy Hartsock not only in order to avoid a discussion with an unmarked and imaginary feminist standpoint interlocutor, but and primarily because she is the author of the article "The Feminist Standpoint..." that "changed the landscape of feminist theory" (Hekman, 1997a: 341) and epistemology, in which she attempted to provide one of the first developed specifically feminist alternative epistemology, at least in Anglo-American feminism, to masculinist ones of the Enlightenment and its successors. Hartsock's standpoint epistemology is at the same time highly influential and controversial among feminists; it has been criticized from the early 1980s, and some of those critiques developed within feminist community influenced on some major changes in the theory during the second half of the 1980s and in the 1990s.

⁵⁵ Cf. Anderson (2004).

On the other hand, Hartsock's is a good example for the discussion about the relationship between feminist theorizing about knowledge and Foucault's so-called epistemology, because she is probably one of the most important critics of postmodernist influences on feminist projects. She provides a critique of postmodernism and Foucault that is unique for feminism,⁵⁶ which makes her theory even more important.

"The Feminist Standpoint..." was initially published in one of the first edited volumes dedicated specifically to feminist theorizing about epistemology, methodology and metaphysics.⁵⁷ Building on the classic standpoint theories, especially those developed by Marx and Lucacs, Hartsock wants to explore the epistemological consequences of a claim that women's lives differ structurally from those of men in contemporary western capitalistic societies. To put it differently, she wants to explore the consequences of the claim that "women and men create their own realities through their different activities and experiences" (Hekman, 1997a: 343). For Hartsock, women's lives provide particular and privileged vantage point on male domination, which can ground an important critique of phallogentric institutions and ideology, which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy. And,

[j]ust as Marx's understanding of the world from the standpoint of proletariat enabled him to go beneath bourgeois ideology, so a feminist standpoint can allow us to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more human social relations (Hartsock, 1987: 159).

Although Hartsock here follows Marx in arguing that the special and unique perspective of one oppressed group gives to the members of that group less distorted and even 'true'

⁵⁶ Cf. Hekman (1990): 154.

knowledge than that available to the ruling/dominant group/class, she also argues that her position goes beyond Marx's perspective: "[p]roletarian labor ... is not as basic as the labor of women because women's labor is closely tied to the necessary, sensuous existence of all human beings" (Hekman, 1990: 127).

There are two 'building blocks'⁵⁸ of this early version of Hartsock's epistemology. First, she accepts feminist object-relations theory,⁵⁹ which posits the psychological and social differences between men and women as consequences of their different relationships with their mothers. According to this theory, mother socializes a boy to become an *independent self*, so boy forms his masculine identity by separating himself from his mother, by negating his mother in order to develop his own masculine identity modeled on an 'idealized masculinity' since the father is not present in the boy's early life. The consequence of this development is boy's anxious rejection of the feminine and the need to maintain distance and boundaries by controlling and denigrating the feminine.

On the other side, female children gain their gender identity through identification with their mothers. They do not have a strong sense of independence, and they enter "adulthood with more complex layering of affective ties and a rich, ongoing set of object relations" (Hartsock, 1987: 168).

⁵⁷ Cf. Harding and Hintikka (1983).

⁵⁸ Cf. Changfoot (2004).

⁵⁹ The feminist object-relations theory was initially developed by Nancy Chodorow (1978), and then accepted by different feminist standpoint theorists, including 'early' Jane Flax, Hilary Rose and Dorothy Smith.

This different development of gender identities for men and women has as its consequence different masculine and feminine *cognitive styles*. While masculine cognitive style is abstract, disembodied, analytical, emotionally detached, and oriented toward domination and control, feminine cognitive style is concrete, embodied, intuitive, emotionally engaged, relational, and oriented toward values of care.

These two different cognitive styles are reinforced by the second ‘building block’ of Hartsock’s early version of feminist standpoint epistemology: the sexual division of labor that occurs within the frame of the heterosexual nuclear family. Namely, different types of labor are assigned to men and women. Men are engaged in theoretical sciences, war-making, politics, economics that all call for detachment and control, while women are engaged in emotional care for others through housework and childrearing. The most controversial element, of many, in this early version of the theory is that Hartsock assumes that the sexual division of labor is experienced by *all* women in relative similar manner no matter their differences regarding class, ethnicity or sexuality. To be fair to Hartsock, she is completely aware that this kind of reasoning *excludes* many women and their different experiences. She claims:

I adopt this strategy *with some reluctance*, since it contains the danger of making invisible the experiences of lesbians or women of color. At the same time, I recognize that the effort to uncover a feminist standpoint assumes that there are some things common to all women’s lives in Western class societies (Hartsock, 1987: 164; emphasis added).

Following Marx, Hartsock uses two-class model to explain women’s oppression in contemporary western world: oppression is understood as homogenous and as such applicable to *all* women. There is a unique oppressed woman’s experience that is

heterosexual and situated in a patriarchal family, and that is abstracted from a number of possible (or even actual) women's experience.

These two elements or building blocks that reinforce each other – the differentiated psychological development between female and male children, and the sexual division of labor – are replicated as epistemology or as different *epistemologies* of men and women. Since male children develop an understanding of themselves as different and oppositional to their mothers, this understanding posits a combative *dualism* at the center of community men construct and masculinist worldview through which they understand their lives. On the other side, female children will carry their relational affective qualities into their adult lives, and they will not develop *autonomous* and *unitary selves* as boys will. Hartsock argues that this kind of gender relationship is replicated in almost all human experiences and that it results in the fact that the experience of men becomes the model for hierarchal and dualist institutions of class society and frameworks of thought. Therefore, the *subject of knowledge* of masculinist epistemologies, grounded in the logic of dualism of self-other relation, will show all the features of masculinity: dominance, hostility and destruction. The world ('reality') reflects masculine values – domination of men over women, hostility among men and women, valorization of domination and death over peace and life, privileging of abstract over the concrete.

Hartsock claims that the feminist standpoint, developed on the basis provided by Marx and Lucacs, could be a solution and cure for destructive tendencies of masculinity. She attempts to translate the concept of the standpoint of proletariat by analogy into feminist

terms. Just as workers are *central* to the system of production, women in contemporary western capitalist societies are central to the system of reproduction through their work on socialization of children and caring for all members of the family. Their central position in the system means that they are in a better position than men to see that patriarchy does not meet all people's needs. Men, because of their dominant position in society can afford to ignore how their actions and lives undermine the interests of others (dominated/subordinated). Therefore, women's epistemic privilege is based on the fact that women as a *class* have privileged information about whose needs are better served under patriarchy.

In addition, Hartsock argues for the epistemic privilege of the feminine cognitive style over the masculine one, because it overcomes the dichotomous way of reasoning and because the ethics of care is superior to ethics of domination. Ways of knowing that emerge from caring for everyone's needs will produce representations of the world in relation to universal human interests, not in the interests of the dominant (male) class:

[T]he female experience not only inverts that of the male, but forms a basis on which to expose abstract masculinity as both partial and fundamentally perverse, as not only occupying only one side of the dualities it has constructed but reversing the proper valuation of human activity (Hartsock, 1987: 171).

This early essay is important not only because it was one of the first feminist attempts in Anglo-American feminism to provide an *alternative* epistemology to prevailing masculinist ones, but because Hartsock here also posits some of the crucial assumptions for her standpoint epistemology, which she has not changed over the years.

First, she argues that knowledge is *situated* and *perspectival* and that there are number of standpoints from which knowledge is produced – women and men create their own realities and understandings of those realities through their different activities and experiences in the society.

Second, although there are multiple standpoints from which knowledge is produced, it does not follow that ‘truth’ and ‘true knowledge’ will be multiple. Her Marxist background prevents this conclusion and Hartsock argues that “[a] standpoint ... carries with it a contention that there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible” (1987: 159).

Third, and connected with the previous, her Marxist background is also evident in her claim that

the concept of a standpoint structures epistemology in a particular way. ... [I]t posits a *duality of reality*, of which the deeper level or essence both includes and explains the ‘surface’ or appearance, and indicates the logic by means of which appearance inverts and distorts the deeper reality (Ibid.: 160; emphasis added).

To sum up, these three elements of Hartsock’s standpoint epistemology have not been changed over the years and she continues to argue that different material situations will lead to different understandings of social relations (‘reality’), and that the dominant group in society will proclaim its perspective as ‘true’ and ‘real’ while rejecting all other

possibilities and proposals. However, the dominant group's understanding ('knowledge') of reality is *ideological, partial, distorted, and perverse*, while the vision of the oppressed/dominated is not: the oppressed's understanding (knowledge) of the world/social reality exposes the true relations between human beings and, therefore, is liberating.⁶⁰ Susan Hekman, in her essay about standpoint epistemologies, claims that "[a]lthough [Hartsock's] formulation [of the feminist standpoint] changes over the years, she continues to maintain both that the reality is socially and materially constructed and that some perceptions of reality are partial, others true and liberatory" (Hekman, 1997a: 343). At the same time, Hartsock also keeps arguing that the feminist standpoint is not a given, but a political achievement: it does not arise directly and unmediated from women's experience, but is the result of a reflection on that experience. Feminist knowledge and epistemologies are 'embattled'⁶¹. Feminist standpoint is the result of the *struggle* to create the space for women's and feminist voices in the world or even different worlds – academic, political, economic, etc. – which try to exclude them, isolate or co-opt them. Knowledge for the oppressed emerges through the struggle against and reflection upon the oppression. For feminist standpoint theorists, such as Hartsock and Harding, the fact that women have struggled against the male supremacy and domination makes the research, which starts from their lives more probable to reach 'true', 'nearly

⁶⁰ From Foucault's point of view, Hartsock here actually repeats the same problems he realizes with liberal and Marxist account of truth (cf. chapter 2 of this paper). She believes as Marxists do that there is one, objective truth, or 'reality': while 'knowledge' of the ruling class/men is 'ideological' and, therefore, useless for anyone except to men, the feminist standpoint developed on the reflection upon the oppression of women represents the 'deeper reality' of the social life, the real truth. Because Hartsock just like Marxists identifies truth with liberation and falsity (ideology) with subjection, she just like Marxists and liberals does not approve a political critique of truth.

⁶¹ Cf. Harding (1990): 90.

complete' visions of the social reality than those available only from the men's side of the struggles: "this need for struggle emphasizes the fact that feminist standpoint is not something that anyone have by claiming it. It is an achievement" (Harding, 1991: 127).

Hartsock has tried on several occasions to distance herself from other feminist standpoint theorists who adopted different definitions of the feminist standpoint. She is aware that it is possible to show

how my own argument for a feminist standpoint can be translated into essentialist claims about women's innate knowledge and become in that way a restatement of liberal ideas about preexisting and independent subjects. ... [M]y original formulation insisted on the importance of a standpoint as an achievement, other versions have adopted the view of a 'women's standpoint' as a 'social given' (Hartsock, 2006: 179).

Although some of her feminist critics would not agree here with Hartsock regarding her original formulation of the feminist standpoint,⁶² she has accepted that she was wrong about something else in early 1980s. She has realized that at that time she attempted

to translate the concept of the standpoint of the proletariat into feminist terms. ... I adopted by analogy a simple two-party opposition between feminist and masculinist representations of the patriarchy. ... I wanted ... to translate the notion of the proletariat (including its privileged historical mission) into feminist terms. I was arguing that, like the lives of proletarian in Marxist theory, women's lives in Western capitalist societies also contained possibilities for developing a critique of domination. ... In following this strategy, I committed an error similar to that of Marx. While he made no theoretical space for any oppression other than class, by following his lead I failed to allow for the importance of differences among women and differences among other various groups – power differences all (Hartsock, 1997: 368).

The other element of her original formulation of the feminist standpoint that also prevented recognizing power differences among women, although Hartsock does not address it, is her previous reliance on the feminist object-relations theory, which posits,

as it has been showed above, differences and opposition between *the* experiences of men and *the* experiences of women, that result in the unitary category of *the* women's experience allegedly common to *all* women.

Jane Flax, one of the feminist critics of this early version of the theory, summarizes the problem of the original formulation of the feminist standpoint in a particularly precise way:

[T]he notion of *a* feminist standpoint that is truer than previous (male) ones seems to rest upon many problematic and unexamined assumptions. ... It ... presupposes gendered social relations in which there is a category of beings who are fundamentally like each other by the virtue of their sex – that is, it assumes otherness men assign to women. Such a standpoint also assumes that women, unlike men, can be free of determination from their own participation in relations of domination such as those rooted in the social relations of race, class, or homophobia (Flax, 1987: 642).

The next phase of the development of Hartsock's theory was fully focused on the possibility of including (power) differences among women and between women and other subjugated groups into the theory. The changes in the theory were not provoked by epistemological discussions about the concept of 'reality' and about the grounds of knowledge, or by postmodernist (male) philosophers who mainly argued about the concept of difference, but by the discussions led within the feminist community about the importance of inclusion of the concept of difference, because otherwise not only a number of different women's experiences will be excluded, but whole groups of women who are not white and middle-class, as well as groups of men who do not fit the criteria of dominant, white, middle-class men. While the first phase of Hartsock's theory was

⁶² Cf. Hekman (1990), Changfoot (2004).

directed against masculinist epistemology in general (traditional and contemporary ones) in order to provide a feminist alternative, the next phase was dedicated to development of feminist epistemology that will be sensitive to (power) differences while arguing against any inclusion of postmodernist ideas about knowledge in feminist theory.

During the second half of 1980s, Hartsock faced a difficult task: she needed to develop a theory that will include differences among women and that will be able at the same time to provide a *systematic* account/knowledge of the world in order to change it. But, how to embrace differences, which means that there are many or multiple standpoints not *the* standpoint of woman/subjugated, and to develop a systematic knowledge/theory necessary for the social change? Hartsock finds the solution in combination of two elements. The first element is the distinction between the center and the periphery.⁶³ The second element is the paradigm of ‘situated knowledges’, which accommodates marginal standpoints expressing multiple and intersecting forms of oppression by putting the stronger emphasis on the cultural, historical, and local embeddedness of any epistemological project.⁶⁴

In an effort to develop a theory of power for women and other subjugated groups, a theory which would embrace differences among women, and to provide an understanding (epistemology) of the world that is sensitive to differences, in order to enable the transformation of power relations, Hartsock argues that women are not a unitary group, while white, middle-class, Eurocentric men are. Men as a unitary group represent a

⁶³ Cf. Hartsock (1996).

dominant group or the ‘center’. The ‘others’, those on ‘periphery’ are heterogeneous group/groups, which include not only white women, but women of color, lesbians, gays, colonized peoples, and all other ‘others’ excluded from the ‘center’, but who are at the very same time the condition of the One, of the center.⁶⁵ In an effort to correct ‘mistakes’ she made in the original formulation of the feminist standpoint, Hartsock here emphasizes differences in the situations between different subjugated groups. Now she argues that “close attention must be given to the specific situations of each group as defined by axes of gender, race, class, and sexuality. I hope to avoid the ‘we are all sisters in struggle’ move in which the feminist subject is unmarked and therefore implicitly Western” (Hartsock, 1996: 51).

When Hartsock speaks about the Others, marginalized, those on the periphery, she urges that

we need to dissolve the false ‘we’ into its real multiplicity and variety and out of this concrete multiplicity build an account of the world seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top and can *transform* the margins as well as the center (Hartsock, 1990: 171; emphasis added).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Cf. Haraway (1988), Mendel (2007).

⁶⁵ Others are, according to Hartsock, defined as everything the dominant group or the center is *not*.

⁶⁶ Hartsock has been widely criticized because of the distinction between center/periphery (Cf. for example, Bar On (1993)). Usually, her critics argue that Hartsock posits the ‘center’ that is heterogeneous, at least when the marginalized Others invade it, but that at the same time she has to keep the concept of the periphery. If others move into the center, and if the goal is the world without domination, how can we keep the concept of the center without keeping the correlative concept of the periphery? Hekman (1997a), for example, believes that Hartsock does not want to abandon the use of the concept of the center, because those of ‘us’, constituted as ‘Others’, must insist on the world and on an account of the world in which ‘we’ are the center. However, Hekman argues that it is not possible to use the concept of the center, although heterogeneous, without the periphery, and who is, then, on the periphery?

These accounts of the world seen from the margins are ‘situated knowledges’, which means for Hartsock, that they are *partial*, because they are located in space and time: they do not see *everything from nowhere*, but they do see *some things from somewhere*. They are expressions of specific embodiments. As situated, these knowledges are *social* and *collective*: the subjects of knowledge are not “isolated and abstract individuals” (Hartsock, 1996: 50) of masculinist epistemologies of the Enlightenment. And finally, the shape of these situated knowledges is affected by the social locations of dominated groups:

These knowledges express multiple and often contradictory realities; they are not fixed but change with the changing shape of historical conjuncture and the balance of the forces. They are both critical of and vulnerable to the dominant culture, and are separated off and opposed to it, yet also contained within it. ... [T]hese knowledges represent a series of achievement: they result from and express a series of ongoing efforts to keep from being made invisible, to keep from being destroyed by the dominant culture. The struggle has very high stakes – survival itself (Hartsock, *ibid.*: 50-51).⁶⁷

If these situated knowledges are *self-conscious*, if the struggles they represent and express are made self-conscious, they “must focus on changing contemporary power relations and thus *point beyond the present*” (Hartsock, *ibid.*: 51; emphasis added).

Although *specificities* of each group’s situation show the fact that the subordination of different groups is usually obtained and maintained by *different* mechanisms, Hartsock

Although Hartsock uses the concept of the center carelessly, the end of the quote maybe indicates her possible answer to the critics. She believes that the alternative accounts built and developed from the margins, or from the periphery, from those who finally get a ‘voice’ and constitute themselves as *subjects* and *agents*, will *transform* both the center and the periphery. In their vision of the different world, there would be no need for the distinction center/periphery, which is necessary now in the world in which they struggle to posit themselves as subjects and agents.

argues that “at the level of epistemology there are number of similarities that can provide the basis for differing groups to understand each other and form alliances” (ibid.: 52).⁶⁸

These epistemologies, in plural, of situated knowledges can provide the construction of *alternative* accounts of knowledge and reality to those of the Enlightenment and postmodernism, which for Hartsock are dead-ends: they posit a false choice between the view from nowhere and the view from everywhere.⁶⁹

Situated knowledges or epistemologies of the marginalized or so-called ‘marked subjectivities’ are *epistemically privileged knowledges*. However,

the criteria for privileging some knowledges over others are ethical or political rather than purely ‘epistemological’. The quotation marks here are to indicate that I see ethical and political concepts such as power as involving epistemological claims on the one hand and ideas of what is to count as knowledge involving profoundly important political and ethical stakes on the other. ... I want to privilege some knowledges over others because they seem to me to offer possibilities for envisioning more just social relations. I believe there is a second aspect to the idea that some knowledges are ‘better’ than others ... the self-conscious transformation of individuals into resistant, oppositional, and collective subjects (Hartsock, 1997: 372-373).

⁶⁷ Hartsock here sounds almost like a Foucauldian!

⁶⁸ Although Hartsock here does not explain what she means under ‘the level of epistemology’, I believe that she has in mind those general features shared by all ‘situated knowledges’ of the marginalized: they are local, partial and perspectival (‘they see *some* things from somewhere’), social, collective, critical and vulnerable to the dominant knowledges, and they have the potential to point beyond present.

⁶⁹ Hartsock, as many other feminists and mainstream political theorists see all postmodernists as relativists.

This analysis of the development of Hartsock's feminist standpoint theory shows some similarities between her and Foucault's epistemological accounts, although Hartsock usually does not recognize or admit them.

First, both Hartsock as well as other standpoint theorists and Foucault are concerned with the relation between power and knowledge, and their accounts of 'epistemology' show that "politics and epistemology are inseparable" (Hekman, 1997b: 399). Knowledge *is* a political event.

Second, both Hartsock and Foucault argue that material/social life structures set limits to our understanding of social world and relations.

Third, the dominant group or, in Foucault's case, dominant knowledge, defines what counts as 'reality' and 'true' in any given society.⁷⁰

Fourth, both Hartsock and Foucault emphasize the need for struggle, through which the 'subjugated' knowledges or the counter-discourses can be articulated. Hartsock speaks from the mid 1980s even like Foucault about knowledges, in plural.

⁷⁰ However, while Foucault argues that what is true/truth in any given society/culture is determined by the dominant relations of power, Hartsock as Marxists argues that the dominant truth is not truth at all: it is an ideology, 'distorted' truth and knowledge. Cf. chapter 2 of this paper.

Fifth, both recognize some similarities at the ‘epistemological’ level between various subjugated, or as Foucault would say ‘local’, knowledges, although they articulate these similarities in different ways.⁷¹

Despite these similarities⁷², it is obvious from the previous chapter about Foucault and from this analysis of Hartsock’s theory, that there are some crucial differences between Foucault’s and Hartsock’s theorizing. I argue that there are three crucial concepts – *power, the subject of knowledge, and the role of subjugated knowledges* – which are understood so differently in these two authors, that Hartsock believes that it would be dangerous and harmful to make any kind of alliance between feminism and Foucault. She is highly suspicious of the usefulness of his epistemological/political analysis for feminist needs, and she is not alone. A number of feminists would agree that the best solution is to keep Foucault at a safe distance from feminism especially because of his account of *power*. However, the concept of power is crucial for understanding of all other epistemological/political terms, such as subject/knower and the role of knowledges produced by marginalized/oppressed. All these concepts are important for feminist projects, and it seems to some feminists that Foucault’s account contradicts feminism and its claim that women are oppressed group in patriarchal systems and that his account prevents committed collective political action:

It is essential that feminist thinkers not be *seduced* by the work of Foucault, that we not attempt to apply the hypotheses he articulates to the situation of women without careful consideration of his work. ... There is the danger that Foucault’s challenges to traditional categories, if taken to a ‘logical’ conclusion, if made into imperatives rather

⁷¹ Cf. chapter 2 for Foucault’s account of ‘subjugated knowledges’. For differences between Foucault’s and Hartsock’s accounts, cf. section 3.3.3 of this paper.

⁷² Some of these similarities are recognized by Hekman (1997a).

left as hypotheses and/or methodological provocations, could make the question of women's oppression obsolete (Martin, 1982: 7, 17; emphasis added).

Feminists ought to resist [Foucault's] *seductive* ploys since ... the price for giving in to his powerful discourse is nothing else than depoliticization of feminism. If we capitulate to Foucault's analysis, we will find ourselves caught up in a sado-masochistic spiral of power and resistance which, circling endlessly in heterogeneous movement, creates a space in which it will be impossible to argue that women under patriarchy constitute an oppressed group, let alone develop a theory of their liberation (Moi, 1985: 95; emphasis added).

Hartsock is not seduced by Foucault, and she worries about the very same things as Martin and Moi, and many other feminists. Therefore, I will turn now to Hartsock's feminist critique of Foucault's ideas of power, subject of knowledge and the role of subjugated knowledges, in order to explain the dangers these feminist authors see in Foucault's seductive stories.

3.3 Hartsock vs. Foucault

3.3.1 Power

The first concept that shows a deep disagreement between Hartsock and Foucault is the concept of power. Hartsock is aware that power is "essentially contested" (1990: 158) concept and that different epistemologies are based on different theories of power.

In the mainstream literature there is a distinction between two meanings of the term 'power': power with the meaning 'power-over', which means getting someone else to do what you want them to do, and 'power-to', with the meaning of ability or capacity to

act.⁷³ In feminist literature, Amy Allen (2005) identifies three main ways of conceptualization of power, and some of them intersect with those two meanings in the mainstream literature. The first is ‘power as a resource’. This conception of power is characteristic for liberal feminism that argues that power as a resource is unequally and unjustly distributed between men and women in patriarchy, so the feminist goal should be redistribution of power in more just ways. The second way of understanding power in feminist theory is ‘power as domination’, or as a relation of domination, that is shared by different strands in feminism: from phenomenological, through radical to socialist/Marxist feminists. The third way power is understood in feminist literature is as capacity or ‘empowerment’⁷⁴, both individual and collective. All these three feminist conceptions of power, that Allen identifies, understand power as a possession, and as such are contrasted to Foucault’s idea of power.⁷⁵

Foucault’s conception of power Allen subsumes under the heading ‘power-over’: we can speak about the structures and mechanisms of power only if “we suppose that certain persons exercise power over others” (Foucault, 1982: 217). Hartsock is, on one side, concerned with the views of power as domination and subordination, and her Marxist

⁷³ Cf. Allen (2005).

⁷⁴ It is not quite clear why Allen makes this threefold classification because ‘empowerment’ means to give power to, so power as giving power to seems to be tautological. It does not say what power is. In fact, it assumes that power is one of the first two categories. I mention this distinction as one of the most recent proposed by feminist author – Amy Allen (2005), who complains that power, although one of the central concepts for feminist theory, is not sufficiently elaborated within feminist theory. However, her attempt to provide a classification of feminist positions regarding such a crucial concept as power is far from comprehensive and successful, and unfortunately she does not see that the third ‘option’ only repeats and assumes one of the previous two.

feminist side is evident in her claim that power and domination have been associated with male and masculinity, and that power in the western capitalist societies is understood from the perspective of the socially dominant ruling class/men. However, Hartsock is also trying to reformulate the concept of power from the feminist standpoint (and that is also in accordance with her Marxist side) that can “point beyond understandings of power as power over others” (Hartsock, 1983: 12). If the goal of feminism is to change women’s subordinate status, then it is required, according to Hartsock, to start thinking about power in a different way. If feminism wants to change the relations of domination, then “we need a usable theory of power” (Hartsock, 1990: 157). However, she asserts that feminists will not find such a theory in Foucault’s work, although his intention was to “illuminate power relations” (ibid.: 165). Foucault “fails to provide a theory of power for women” (ibid.: 158) or a theory of power developed for women and other marginalized and subordinated groups. Despite the fact that both, Foucault and feminist standpoint theorists argue for the necessary connection between power and knowledge, the inseparability of epistemology and politics, Hartsock is suspicious about the usefulness of Foucault’s concept of power for feminist epistemological/political project.

Hartsock reads and interprets Foucault’s middle works through the lens of her feminist standpoint theory, and, to repeat, she argues that a standpoint “carries with it a contention that there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible” (Hartsock, 1987: 159). Foucault’s particular location of white, privileged,

⁷⁵ For Foucault’s account of power and his critique of liberal and Marxist accounts, see

middle-class man, or the “dominator” (Hartsock, 1990:165), leads him to develop an inadequate account of power for women and other marginalized or subjugated groups. His account is inadequate because he does not explore power from the epistemological point of view of the marginalized, and because his ‘material life’ structures and sets limits on his understanding of the world. Therefore, Foucault, according to Hartsock, analyzes power from the perspective of ‘the colonizer’, not ‘the colonized’.

Hartsock uses the distinction made by Alfred Memmi,⁷⁶ between the colonizer who accepts power relations involved and the colonizer who refuses them or resists them, to explain Foucault’s account of power. On one side, there are the Enlightenment theorists, who are colonizers who accept the power relations: their theories are situated knowledges of one particular group of white, racially and economically privileged men. Their epistemic position is the position of an ‘omnipotent god’. On the other side, there are postmodern theorists, the group in which Foucault participates, whose theories Hartsock labels as situated knowledges of “epistemological despair” (1996: 46). This position is a position of, at best, “an impotent critic” (ibid.) of power/knowledge constellation. While modernist and Enlightenment theorists embrace their position of ‘the colonizers who accept’ power relations, Foucault’s position among postmodernists, represents a special case of the colonizer who does not ignore, like Richard Rorty, but who “resists ... [power] relations” (1990:164), who refuses them, and in that way “fails to provide an epistemology which is usable for the task of revolutionizing, creating and constructing” (ibid.).

As it has been said, according to standpoint logic, “certain situations are more likely to produce distortions and partial visions than others” (Sawicki, 1996: 163), and Foucault’s position of the privileged, or of the ‘dominator’, despite his ‘good intentions’ and ‘sympathy’ for those who are subjugated or marginalized – the mad, the delinquent, etc. – results in an account of power that is “inadequate and even irrelevant to the needs of the colonized or the dominated” (Hartsock, 1990: 166).

Foucault argues about power *relations* as pervasive and dispersed all over the social body, as ‘capillary’ and ‘omnipresent’, which for Hartsock means that he neglects and cannot account for the existing and persistent *asymmetrical* relations of power between men and women, and that he cannot take into his account *systematic* and *structural* relations of domination and inequality that underlie women’s subordination in western capitalist societies:

all social life comes to be a network of power-relations which should be analyzed not at the level of *large-scale social structures* but rather at very local, individual levels. ... The whole thing comes to look very homogeneous. Power is everywhere, and so ultimately nowhere (Hartsock: 1990: 170; emphasis added).

In other words, Foucault emphasizes ‘capillary’ power relations and micro-politics without providing *any* analysis of overall structures of domination.⁷⁷ Since for feminists, the abolishing of the asymmetry of power between sexes is crucial and central for their projects,⁷⁸ Foucault’s account of power as productive, and not as something which some

⁷⁶ Cf. Hartsock (1990): 160-165.

⁷⁷ Alcoff (1988) makes the similar point like Hartsock.

⁷⁸ Cf. McLaren (1997): 115-116.

people *possess* while others do not, which refuses to equate power with social structures, such as patriarchy, and to locate it in social structures and institutions, represents *poor* analytical tool. His concept of power is on one side too *broad*, because Foucault applies it to all social relations, and on the other, too *weak*, because, if power is everywhere, it is ‘ultimately nowhere’, and therefore, “systematic power relations ultimately vanish in his work” (Hartsock, 1990: 168). The unsystematic nature of power, its presence in multiple social relations, that are heterogeneous and with their own specificities, leads Foucault to analyze how *individuals* exercise and experience power, and not the social structures that are important for Hartsock. Precisely because Foucault refuses to locate power in hands of some groups, and because in his account there is no “binary opposition between rulers and the ruled” (1990: 169), feminists, according to Harstcok, should not accept the dangerous consequences of Foucault’s ideas of power. For him, “struggles within society are not essentially about the *possession* of power, but rather the contrasted terms of deployment of power, [which means that he] ... contests a notion of men’s *possession* of power over women” (Brooks, 1997: 57; emphasis added). This is the main reason why Hartsock argues that Foucault is more *with* power: he understands the world from the perspective of the dominant group, and domination when it is viewed from above is more likely to appear as equality. However, Hartsock and other feminists argue that it is impossible to interpret our (western, capitalist) society in such a way that women *have* equal power relative to men.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Cf. Alcoff (1988) and Deveaux (1996), who shares this view with Hartsock.

To sum up, Hartsock has basically two major objections regarding Foucault's account of power. First, from her feminist standpoint, Foucault's analysis of power is not and cannot be a theory *for* women and other marginalized groups because he does not analyze power from the epistemological perspective of the marginalized/subordinated. Second, his account of power as positive and productive, not as a possession and something that is located in social structures and institutions, ignores and neglects systematically unequal relations of power and domination which structure women's subordinate position in western societies.

Moreover, contra Foucault, who according to Hartsock, is in the position of an impotent critic, feminists cannot afford to provide only critiques of dominant relations of power. Feminism needs reconceptualization of the concept of power with the meaning of power-over, which is understood in Hartsock's work as domination and control, and therefore, as implicitly masculinist, into power as capacity or ability to empower and transform. Her feminist standpoint theory "should allow us to understand why the masculine community constructed ... power as domination, repression, and death, and why women's account of power differ in specific and systematic ways from those put forward by men."⁸⁰ The feminist standpoint could put forward the understanding of power that points in more liberatory directions:

If we agree with Hartsock's suggestion that feminists need to envisage a nondominant world, we should not slip into fatalistic views about the omnipresence of power. This means rejecting Foucault's views that absolutely *no* social or personal relations escape permeation by power (Deveaux, 1996: 222).

⁸⁰ Cf. Hartsock quoted in Allen (2005): § 4.

Foucault, who believes that a vision of a society with no power relations, understood as power-over, is an abstraction⁸¹, does not share this hope and vision.

3.3.2 The Subject of Knowledge/Knower

In the previous chapter I have argued that Foucault's conception of power is crucial for his understanding and analysis of the subject of knowledge, so it is not surprising that Hartsock as well as other feminist theorists and epistemologists find as very problematic the concept of the knower that is the consequence of Foucault's account of power.

Foucault, as we have seen, explicitly rejects analyzing power within the paradigm of repression, because it cannot embrace all aspects of power: power is not only negative, but primarily creative. Power is not only prohibitive, rule-based and uniform – the characterizations which we can find in a so-called juridical model of power, but first and foremost positive and productive; it is everywhere, omnipresent, dispersed all over the social body. As such, power *produces* and *creates* the knowing subjects. In other words, Foucault rejects the constituting knowing subject of the Enlightenment epistemology. This rejection, however, worries some feminists, who argue that we need the notion of that subject in order to have political and moral agency.⁸² Alcoff, for example, worries that, according to Foucault, we, as subjects, are *overdetermined*, constructed by power/knowledge relations, social discourse and cultural practice.⁸³ As Hartsock puts it, in Foucault's world, "subjects not only cease to be sovereign but also ... external forces,

⁸¹ Cf. Foucault (1982).

⁸² Cf. McLaren (1997): 110.

⁸³ Cf. Alcoff (1988): 416.

such as power are given access even to the body and thus are the forces which constitute the subjects as a kind of effect” (Hartsock, 1990: 167). Foucault’s subject is, therefore, “totally determined, because it is enmeshed in relationships of power and is produced as effect through disciplines and practices” (McLaren, 1997: 110).

Foucault’s *rejection* of the constituting subject of knowledge of the Enlightenment philosophy and epistemology, and its reconception as always *subjected*, as an effect, not the cause of knowledge and power, have produced a large amount of criticism by feminists:

Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at this precise moment when so many groups have been engaged in ‘nationalisms’ which involve redefinitions of the marginalized Others that suspicions emerge about the ‘subject’, about the possibilities for a general theory that can describe the world, about historical ‘progress’. Why is it that just at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes problematic? Just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be theorized. Just when we are talking about the changes we want, ideas of progress and the possibility of systematically and rationally organizing human society become dubious and suspect. ... I contend that these intellectual moves are no accidents (but no conspiracy either). They represent the transcendental voice of the Enlightenment attempting to come to grips with the social and historical changes of the middle-to-late twentieth century (Hartsock, 1990: 163-164).

Hartsock is not alone in her suspicion about postmodernist and Foucault’s rejection of the rational subject of knowledge, or the subject that is the cause of knowledge. Similarly,

Rosi Braidotti argues that

the combination of conceptual elements is quite paradoxical: *deconstructing*, dismissing, or displacing the notion of the rational subject at the very historical moment when women are beginning to have access to the use of discourse, power and pleasure. ... [However], one cannot *deconstruct* a subjectivity one has never been fully granted (1994: 140-141; emphasis added).

In addition, Linda Alcoff asks some very important questions: How can we ground a feminist politics that *deconstructs* the female subject?⁸⁴ And how to oppose the universal, neutral and perspectiveless epistemology if we reject the subjectivity? Alcoff argues along the same lines as Hartsock that the rejection of the knowing subject colludes with the ‘generic human’ thesis of the Enlightenment: particularities of the individuals are not important; they are even irrelevant and improper influences on knowledge.⁸⁵ Therefore, for Hartsock, Alcoff, and some other feminist theorists,⁸⁶ contra Foucault, there is a need, even a necessity for “the construction of the subjectivities of the Others, subjectivities which will be both multiple and specific” (Hartsock, 1990: 163).

Unlike Foucault’s genealogical epistemology, Hartsock’s standpoint theory is a subject-centered project, a project that is focused on the constitution of women as subjects, and other marginalized others as subjects of knowledge, because she assumes that that constitution is the *precondition* for all questioning of universalistic claims made by the Enlightenment and liberal theorists. Foucault’s account of the subject as an effect is not the emancipatory account of subjectivity, and therefore is useless, even dangerous for feminism.

⁸⁴ The problem that is evident with this kind of reading of Foucault’s works provided by Braidotti, Alcoff and others is that they confuse psychoanalytical, Derrida’s and Foucault’s approaches which are not similar but essentially different. Although I try to avoid feminists’ misreading of Foucault because he performs no deconstruction at all, sometimes is hard to ignore these mistakes, because they are in the very center of their arguments against Foucault. Nevertheless, Foucault is not interested in deconstruction. What he is interested is the subject’s historical constitution.

⁸⁵ Cf. Alcoff (1988): 420.

⁸⁶ Cf. Di Stefano (1990) and Deveaux (1996).

Although feminism entails both the problematization and embracing of the subject, Hartsock does not want to “argue for a ‘me too’ position in order to work for women’s inclusion in the number of social institutions” (1997: 369) and in the world of subjects as liberal feminists do, although she recognizes that that strategy is sometimes necessary. What Hartsock does in her version of the feminist standpoint theory is reconceptualization and redefinition of the notion of the subject while rejecting the Enlightenment notion as masculine, exclusionary and discriminatory. This refusal, however, does not mean that she is closer to Foucault’s conception of the subject, because she believes that “feminist theory is necessarily political – working to end the oppression of women – [which means that] it is committed to a conception of the subject capable of political and moral *agency*” (McLaren, 1997: 109; emphasis added). Although Foucault rejects the subject of the Enlightenment, he also rejects all constructions of the (constituting) oppositional subjects, such as proletariat, women, or the oppressed, as mirror images that merely recreate and sustain the discourse of power.⁸⁷ Hartsock, as well as Linda Alcoff, however, do not want to embrace the alleged consequences of Foucault’s accounts of power and the subject of knowledge “that an effective feminism could only be a wholly negative feminism” (Alcoff, 1988: 418), which *deconstructs* everything and refuses to construct anything⁸⁸. Various movements of the

⁸⁷ Cf. Alcoff (1988): 417-418.

⁸⁸ Again, Alcoff and other feminists assume that Foucault and Derrida share the idea of deconstruction. The problem is even bigger because both Alcoff and Hartsock actually discuss their philosophies as similar, at least from feminist point of view. However, this reading assumes, first, that Foucault is deconstructive, which he not only is not, but he is hostile to deconstruction. Second, it also assume that deconstruction entails a reconstruction, which it does not. This and already mentioned misreading of Foucault Derrida and psychoanalysis, unfortunately make their critiques weaker than they should

subordinated/marginalized groups have *two* crucial tasks: one of these tasks *is* critique, but the other, equally important is that of *construction*, and the construction of the subjectivities of others is of high importance for all of those who have been devalued and marginalized by the Enlightenment tradition.

To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centered inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency (Di Stefano, 1990: 76).

To sum up, for Hartsock and other feminist theorists, Foucault's conception of the subject of knowledge is unable to account for human experience and consciousness as *actively* involved in changing the nature of discursive regime: his subject is constituted within a discourse and by relations of power, which means, for some of his feminist critics that he/she lacks agency⁸⁹, and these feminists ask, what opportunity this subject has for resistance and transformation of power relations?⁹⁰

3.3.3 The Role of 'Subjugated Knowledges'

The differences between Foucault's and Hartsock's approaches to the concepts of power and the subject of knowledge, lead to different conceptions of the role that subjugated knowledges or 'counter-discourses' have in these two frameworks.

be in case of a careful and more comprehensive understanding of differences between these two authors and different theoretical approaches.

⁸⁹ Not all feminist authors and Foucault's critics share this view of the subject of knowledge. Later in this chapter, I will discuss other feminist approaches to this problem that are opposite to this critique.

⁹⁰ Cf. Grimshaw (1993), Ransom (1993), Brooks (1997).

The issue here between Foucault and feminist standpoint theory is whether subjugated knowledges have the potential of *resistance* to dominant, 'hegemonic' knowledge, or they have the potential of *transformation* of dominant, 'hegemonic' discourse/knowledge into new, more democratic and just epistemological/political options, or as Hartsock puts it, whether they can "focus on changing contemporary power relations and thus *point beyond present*" (1996: 51; emphasis added).

For Foucault, as we have seen, subjugated knowledges hold the potential for resistance. It *seems* that genealogy, as 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' could be compatible with feminist efforts to give a voice to the marginalized, to restore oppressed knowledges of various marginalized and subjugated groups. However, Hartsock does not believe in an alliance with Foucault and other postmodernist thinkers arguing that "[d]espite their apparent congruence with the project I am proposing, I ... argue that these theories would hinder rather than help its accomplishment" (1990:159), and "that postmodernist theories suffer from a number of epistemological difficulties that cannot be fully remedied by the addition of a dose of feminist politics" (1996: 40).

From the mid 1980s' version of Hartsock standpoint theory until today, she keeps arguing first, that although the visions of the dominant/ruling group as well as the visions of subjugated/marginalized groups are *situated knowledges*, knowledges from particular perspectives, because material and social life both structures and sets limits to understanding of power relations, and second, that 'hegemonic' discourses/knowledges of the dominant group define what is 'real' and 'true' in a given society (and Foucault

would agree on both points here), she also keeps arguing, as a Marxist, that while the ruling group's knowledge (the dominant knowledge) is partial and perverse, the knowledge of the marginalized and oppressed is not. While the knowledge of the ruling group represents an 'ideology' – distorted truth/knowledge, which only *appears* to be true, the knowledge of the oppressed and marginal exposes the 'real' relations among humans – that knowledge is not distorted and perverse, and therefore, it is genuinely true.

Contrary to Hartsock, Foucault claims that all knowledges, all perspectives, dominant or subjugated ones, are partial and 'perverse', precisely because all knowledges are knowledges from some specific *perspective*; they, as Hartsock herself acknowledges, see some things from somewhere. Therefore, subjugated knowledges, local knowledges are another discourses, 'counter-discourses' that seek to subvert and disrupt the 'hegemonic' ones; as 'counter-discourses' they are not closer to the 'reality' than the discourse they expose and oppose. Foucault valorizes subjugated knowledges not because they give more accurate, 'true' representation of the Real, but as I have argued, because they have different relationship to power than dominant, totalizing knowledge(s). In that way, they *may* be closer to a different epistemology, that would be local, specific and particular, and to a definition of a less repressive society.⁹¹

However, from Hartsock's perspective, *mere* resistance, which is, according to her, the only role of subjugated knowledges in Foucault's account is too *weak* for feminist liberatory and emancipatory projects. She argues that from Foucault's account follows

⁹¹ Cf. Hekman (1997a): 345.

that “those of us who have been marginalized remain at the margins” (Hartsock, 1990: 168), and that “Foucault suggests that if our resistance succeeded, we would simply be changing one discursive identity for another and in the process create new oppressions” (ibid.: 170), which is unacceptable for Hartsock, who, unlike Foucault, believes that is possible to envision society without oppression.

Hartsock’s need for a systematic understanding of the world, or for the ‘big picture’, is an expression of her fear that if women/feminists and other marginalized groups are unable to provide systematic account of themselves and their worlds, they will be unable to change it. For Hartsock, systematic knowledge is necessary for any movement that requires a social change. Therefore, if feminism abandons the feminist standpoint, then it could be in danger to abandon the goal of feminist analysis and politics – to reveal the oppression of women and to argue for more democratic and just society. Since Foucault claims that *all* perspectives, even that of the subjugated, are partial and ‘perverse’, he is for Hartsock someone who is more ‘with power’ rather than against it:

[F]rom the perspective of the ruling group, other ‘knowledges’ would appear to be illegitimate or not allowed to function within the official knowledge. ... They would appear to be ... as ‘insurrectionary’, ‘disordered’, ‘fragmentary’, ‘lacking autonomous life’. To simply characterize the variety of ‘counter-discourses’ or ‘antisciences’ as *nonsystematic*, negates the fact that they rest on organized and indeed material bases (Hartsock, 1990:167; emphasis added).

Unlike Foucault, Hartsock argues that it is possible to develop a systematic account of the world from the specific locations and perspectives of the marginalized groups, which will not be another totalizing and falsely universal discourse, although they will be

constitutive of a different world, more democratic world, that will be beyond power relations understood as domination or power-over.

While for Foucault, subjugated knowledges have the potential of resistance against totalizing and dominant knowledges, Hartsock sees in his defense of the subjugated knowledges only ‘deep pessimism’: precisely because Foucault sees power as ever expanding, he cannot argue for transformative potential of these knowledges; power can even try to ‘annex’ and subsume the counter-discourses that have developed.⁹² For Foucault, we cannot escape power relations; we cannot go beyond power structures. Even if we escape one epistemic/political regime, we will only fall into another one. There is no world, no epistemic or political space that is beyond power relations, understood as power-over. If we try to imagine such a world, that world would be a place where there are no social relations, and as such is an abstraction.

Hartsock, argues, contra Foucault, that marginalized groups can develop a systematic account of the world that will not treat their perspective as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as constitutive of a *different world*. That account will not be just another totalizing discourse, because the history of marginalization of various subjugated groups will work against creation of another violent and unitary system. Hartsock does not want to ‘romanticize’ the positions of the marginalized: she argues that it is *less probable* that

⁹² At this point it is important to notice that Hartsock only two years after the first publication of “Foucault on Power”, in another essay is fully aware of this vulnerability of subjugated knowledges of which Foucault speaks about. Cf. section 3.2 of this paper for this point and Hartsock (1996). This article is for Susan Hekman an evidence for

marginalized groups would see themselves as universal ‘man’. Similarly, Donna Haraway claims that

[t]he standpoints of the subjugated ... are preferred because in principle they are *least likely* to allow denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts. ... ‘Subjugated’ standpoints are preferred because they *seem* to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world (Haraway, 1988: 584; emphasis added).

Haraway, just like Hartsock, argues that “not just any partial perspective will do. ... We are ... bound to seek perspective from those points of view ... that promise something *extraordinary*, that is, knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination” (ibid.: 585; emphasis added).

Unlike Foucault’s pessimism, feminist epistemologists, such as Hartsock and Haraway, have a hope that the transformative knowledge is possible, knowledge that is not a ‘mere’ resistance, subversion or a disruption against the totalizing ones. This hope is in contradiction to Foucault’s pessimism, so his cautious stance toward the role of subjugated knowledges is not only too weak, but also ‘inadequate’ for feminist goals.⁹³

To conclude, three concepts – power, the subject of knowledge and the role of subjugated knowledges – reflect the main differences between Foucault’s and Hartsock’s epistemological accounts. Although there are some similarities between Foucault and the feminist standpoint theory, which are usually unrecognized by Hartsock, the differences are understood as crucial and as such they prevent any alliance between Foucault and

transformation of Hartsock’s Marxist standpoint theory by her feminist reading of Foucault. Cf. Hekman (1996b): 5.

feminism. However, not *all* feminist epistemologists share Hartsock's critical stance toward Foucault, and there is a possibility to interpret his work as more useful, at least useful to some extent, for feminist epistemological projects. Feminist postmodernists provide this line of argument.

3.4 Feminist Postmodernists And the Feminist Standpoint

Feminist postmodernists as a group within the field of feminist epistemology identified by Harding, represent a strand that argues that despite the complex relationship between feminism and the Enlightenment, and despite the Enlightenment's roots of feminism, feminism belongs much more to the terrain of postmodernism than to that of the Enlightenment.⁹⁴

Although feminist postmodernists share with feminist standpoint theories a critique of the masculinist traditional epistemology, unlike their standpoint counterparts these feminists embrace postmodernism because of its critique of the Enlightenment's epistemic framework. In the field of feminist epistemology, these feminists usually develop *critiques* of the established/proposed feminist theories of knowledge, and, not surprisingly, they are very critical about feminist standpoint theories.

Feminist postmodernists' critiques of proposed theories of knowledge are usually based on a few principles. First, feminist postmodernists do not allow anything less than complete rejection of all dualisms that provide the basis of traditional epistemology,

⁹³ Cf. Hartsock (1990): 166.

because all of those dualisms rest on the underlying dichotomy between male and female, with the result of privileging the 'male' side in each pair of these basic dualisms. "An epistemology that defines women as not fully rational, moral or even human cannot be simply repaired to allow women a new status. It must be rejected outright (Hekman, 1990: 59).

Second, feminist postmodernists argue that 'postmodernism', such as that of Foucault, can help in revealing some of the 'errors' in contemporary feminism, such as the category of woman as ahistorical and transcultural, or the concept of essential female nature.

Third, feminism can, on the other side, work as corrective of postmodernism of male authors whose critique of the Enlightenment epistemological framework is incomplete, because it is usually gender blind. Feminist epistemologists, unlike male postmodernists, emphasize that the problem with the traditional epistemological thought is not only in its dualisms and dichotomous thinking, but in the fact that those dualisms and dichotomies, and the whole way of thinking are gendered.

Fourth, feminist postmodernists emphasize that there is no one (masculine) true knowledge, or one general truth, but many knowledges and many truths, "none of which is privileged along the gender lines" (Hekman, 1990: 9).

⁹⁴ Cf. Flax (1987).

These general principles of feminist postmodernism in epistemology indicate why within this field a lot of critiques of feminist standpoint theories have emerged. Some of these critiques have been developed against the earliest versions of the standpoint theories, which have been in the meantime changed and reformulated. However, some of the critiques are developed against certain still existing important features of feminist standpoint theories, and Foucault's epistemological thinking at least in part, influences these critiques.

In the section 3.2 of this chapter, I have emphasized that despite many changes and reformulations of Hartsock's theory, some crucial assumptions have remained the same. Hartsock argues from the very beginning, that, first, material and social reality structure and set limits to our understandings of the world, which means that all knowledge is located and situated, and second, that one location/perspective, the standpoint of the marginalized is privileged because it provides the vantage point that reveals the truth of social and material reality.⁹⁵

Jane Flax criticizes the original version of feminist standpoint and Hartsock's two assumptions in following way:

We cannot simultaneously claim (1) that the mind, the self, the knowledge are socially constituted and that what we can know depends upon our social practices and contexts *and* (2) that feminist theory can uncover the Truth of the whole once and for all. Such an absolute truth ... would require the existence of an 'Archimedes point' outside of the whole and beyond our embeddedness in it from which we could see (and represent) the whole (Flax, 1987: 633).⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Cf. Hartsock (1987), (1990), (1996), (1997); Flax (1987); Hekman (1997a).

While Hartsock and Foucault would agree regarding the first assumption, the second one is more than problematic for both Foucault and feminist postmodernists. Susan Hekman, however, argues that the deconstruction of the second assumption is implicit in the first, and the problematic nature of the second assumption has become even more troubling for Hartsock's theory especially when her theory has started to change.

I have shown that during the mid 1980s Hartsock has started to use the paradigm of 'situated knowledges'. She uses that term to argue that although the oppressed cannot see everything from nowhere, they can see some things from somewhere, and that those 'situated knowledges' of 'the marked subjectivities' of the oppressed can provide and obtain knowledge of the social reality and recognize the centrality of systematic power relations. Unlike Foucault who believes that precisely because *all* knowledge is situated and perspectival, *all* visions will be partial, Hartsock "cannot accept the logical consequence of [the position of situated knowledges]: that no perspective/standpoint is epistemologically privileged" (Hekman, 1997a: 351). Moreover, the problem is even bigger for Hartsock if she keeps arguing, as she does, that the *systematic* knowledge of the world/social reality is possible from particular and limited perspectives. What Hartsock needs to provide and she has still not done it, is an argument how systematic knowledge of reality is possible, because "it is not enough simply to assume that Marx got it right on such a crucial point" (Hekman, *ibid.*: 355).

⁹⁶ For similar argument, cf. Flax (1992).

Just as Hartsock argues that it would be *dangerous* and *harmful* for feminism to include in it the postmodern ideas of knowledge, power and the subject of knowledge, Jane Flax argues that feminist standpoint theories are *dangerous* for feminism because

[d]espite postmodernist challenges ... [they] sustain the Enlightenment hope that it is possible to obtain 'better' knowledge and epistemologies. By better, they mean (at minimum) knowledges and epistemologies less contaminated by less false beliefs and dominating relations of power. They believe feminist theories are progressive; that is, they are freer from these effects than previous thinking and therefore represent a higher and more adequate stage of knowledge (Flax, 1992: 456).

Moreover, feminist standpoint theorists' arguments are for Flax "profoundly mistaken", because

[o]perating within the Enlightenment metanarrative, these feminist theorists confuse two different claims – that certain kinds of knowledge are generated by gender-based power relations and that correcting for these biases will necessarily produce 'better', knowledge that will be purely emancipatory. ... They are not content with constructing discourses which privilege some of those who have previously lacked power (at the necessary expense of others) but wish to claim dis-discovery of ways to increase the general sum of human emancipation. These theorists assume that domination and emancipation are a binary pair and that to displace one necessarily creates new space for the other. They conceive disruption of the given as entailing an obligation to create something new. ... They fear what will emerge in disrupted spaces if they are not in feminist control. ... Although the discovery of new knowledges may be dependent upon disruptions of previously existing power relations, the effects of its social origins are somehow transformed by epistemological means. Epistemology also gives a force to new knowledge (independent of politics) that would otherwise lack (Flax, *ibid.*: 457).

Flax here, not only criticizes feminist standpoint theorists for their inability to go beyond the traditional/Enlightenment framework, but, surprisingly accuses them that like the Enlightenment thinkers, they keep epistemology as separate from politics, as based on 'neutral' values, which cannot result in distortion or erasure of 'truth'. Although Flax is right that feminist standpoint theorists have a complex relationship with the Enlightenment thought and values, her critique seems too harsh and she does not

acknowledge the important changes that have been developed at least in theories of some feminist standpoint epistemologists. Unlike Flax, Susan Hekman (1997a) argues that it is possible to reformulate the feminist standpoint in such a way that it can be acceptable for feminist postmodernists and would not suffer from its 'logical' problems. That transformation, however, will not be achieved relying on the works of Marx, but much more by taking into the account Foucault's critique and cautious stance toward the established theories.

We should understand feminist standpoint theories as well as other feminist theories as counter-discourse which try to destabilize dominant, hegemonic discourse or theory of knowledge, but not because that counter-discourse is epistemologically privileged. Since knowledge is particular and the subject of knowledge is socially constructed, the feminist standpoint can be defined as situated and engaged knowledge, as a location from which feminists articulate a counter-discourse and argue for less repressive society. However, this means that "[a]ny feminist standpoint will necessarily be partial" (Flax, 1987: 642), and that women/feminists speak from multiple standpoints providing multiple knowledges and multiple points of resistance. This fact does not prevent, as Hartsock is afraid, women and feminists to work together for specific political goals. Unlike Flax, who situates feminist standpoint theories completely within the field and framework of the Enlightenment thought and its epistemology, Hekman believes that reformulated standpoint theory is, as well as Foucault's 'epistemology', part of a new paradigm of knowledge that is emerging, which constitutes an 'epistemological break' with the Enlightenment thought and its epistemology.

However, standpoint theorists themselves do not share this reformulation of the feminist standpoint.⁹⁷ Although they differ in their relationships with the tradition⁹⁸, and although there are “different standpoint theorists, in the plural” (Harding, 1997: 389), *all* standpoint theorists do argue for ‘epistemologically’ privileged, better discursive accounts of social worlds. In other words, Hekman’s attempt to make the standpoint theory more ‘postmodern’ and more ‘Foucauldian’, not only that is not welcomed among standpoint theorists, but puts into a question the existence of *the* feminist standpoint epistemologies by rejecting one of their crucial claims: some perspectives and knowledges are privileged and ‘better’ than others. Therefore, it seems these two theoretical approaches that Harding identified as contrasted in 1986 are still contrasted frameworks whose advocates have different ideas and goals in pursuing epistemological inquiries. They, as it may be expected, differ in their approaches to the usefulness of Foucault’s epistemological and political ideas for feminist projects.

3.5 Feminist Postmodernists vs. Hartsock

⁹⁷ Cf. Hartsock (1997), Harding (1997), Collins (1997), Smith (1997).

⁹⁸ Harding for example on various occasions asks: “how could a feminist theory completely take a leave of Enlightenment assumptions and still remain feminist?” (1991: 186). The same point is made by Harding in Harding (1990): 99. On the other side, Hartsock rejects the masculinist thought of the Enlightenment and even claim although does not further explain: “I see Marx as an anti-Enlightenment figure on balance, although it must be recognized that his relationship to the Enlightenment and the whole tradition of Western political thought is that of both the inherited son and the rebellious son” (Hartsock, 1997: 369). Therefore, for Hartsock, contra Foucault, Marx’s thought do represent the ‘epistemological break’ with the tradition.

Hartsock's feminist critics are aware that Foucault's work is gender blind, androcentric, and that it can put into the question the possibility of feminist/women's collective political action:

Foucault is, despite his iconoclastic stance, yet another androcentric European male theorist that feminists are exhorted to follow. ... Does Foucault's location as a malestream theorist negate his usefulness for feminism? The feminist question, Can the master's tools dismantle the master's house? applies to Foucault as well as to the more orthodox authors. ... Feminists have used Foucault's method to engage in gender analysis, but Foucault himself does not engage in such analysis. This omission is significant for feminism. ... Foucault's work has raised profound questions about the viability of a feminist politics. Central to Foucault's approach is his deconstruction of a stable subject. Many feminists have argued that this deconstruction problematizes a feminist politics because 'woman' disappears. How, they ask, can we seek the liberation of 'woman' if, on Foucault's account, no such entity exists? (Hekman, 1996b: 1-2).⁹⁹

However, despite realizing the same problems Hartsock identifies in her critique of Foucault, feminist postmodernists argue that she neglects some of his important insights for feminist theory. Hartsock is right that Foucault's analysis of power as 'capillary', omnipresent and pervasive all over the social body cannot account for systematic and structural relations of domination and inequality that underlie women's subordination in western societies,¹⁰⁰ or in other words, that his account is not useful for macro, structural analysis of power that feminism requires.¹⁰¹ However, first,

nothing in Foucault's work precludes having both micro- and macro-levels of analysis. Foucault acknowledges more than once that although power is pervasive it is not equally distributed. His methodological recommendation is that we reverse the usual order of analysis of power. Rather 'from the top down' analysis such as Marxism, we should conduct what Foucault calls 'ascending analysis' of power. This type of analysis moves from the local and particular to the more general in order to capture the myriad of forms and techniques of power (McLaren, 1997: 115-116).

⁹⁹ For similar accounts cf. Hekman (1990); Sawicki (1991), (1996).

¹⁰⁰ And that is not only problem for Hartsock, but as it has been shown for Alcoff (1988) and Deveaux (1996), just to name a few.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Allen (1996).

And second, Foucault does not deny that systematic injustice exists or social relations that constitute concrete oppressions and marginalizations. He is aware that domination is frequent in reality. In his later works, usually labeled as ‘post-genealogical’ Foucault tries to be more precise about his ‘analytics of power’ and to answer the critiques that are similar to Hartsock’s. He makes a distinction between power and domination. While domination refers to a situation where resistance is impossible, power refers to relations that are flexible, fluid, and always reversible.¹⁰² Therefore,

[Foucault] endorses efforts of colonized peoples to liberate themselves from totalitarian domination. Thus, Hartsock is mistaken when she claims that Foucault does not acknowledge systematically unequal power relations. Yet, in his own work, rather than focus on top-down forms of totalitarian domination, he attempted to provide tools for those struggling the ... [other] form of power, subjection (Sawicki, 1996: 171).

McLaren and Sawicki here argue that Foucault’s level of analysis is different than that of Hartsock’s, but that he does not deny that the juridical model of power, the one Hartsock and Marxists are interested in, describes one form of power. What Foucault actually wants to do with his analytics of power is to show that that particular model of power – juridical – cannot capture those power relations at the micro-level of society, which make those macro, centralized and repressive forms possible.¹⁰³

Unlike Hartsock and Marxists who think about power as a possession, and consequently need to locate power in centralized source, and then to locate subjects in social body whose standpoint is potentially authentic, Foucault’s understanding of power offers him a

¹⁰² Cf. Foucault (1982).

possibility to grasp more delicate and subtle ways power is exercised at capillary level. He does not deny that state power, or class power, or patriarchy exists. He argues that if we are exclusively focused on those forms of power, we will obscure the whole network and variety of power relations. And Foucault does see power everywhere, spread over the whole field of society – in a family, between a man and a woman, between teacher and pupil, between one who knows and one who does not¹⁰⁴ - which for Sawicki means that he “frees power from the domain of political theory in much the same way as radical feminists did” (Sawicki, 1991: 20), and that fact has very important consequences for feminism. Therefore, Hartsock in her critique of Foucault’s concept of power is only partly right because “Foucault’s agonistic model of power is double-edged. It is useful for feminists to the extent that it disengages us from simplistic, dualistic accounts of power; at the same time, however, it obscures many important experiences of power specific for women” (Deveaux, 1996: 221-222). In other words, Foucault’s analytics of power is useful for feminism, because the agonistic model he provides can show the *diverse* sources of women’s subordination, not only over-monolithic account of male power and male control over women. Foucauldian approach to power relations is useful for feminism particularly at that point where Hartsock was struggling in mid 1980s: how to recognize and include differences among women, different and unequally distributed power relations among women, in feminist theory. Although Hartsock argues that she came to her ‘solution’ how to include power differences among women in her theory because of the pressure and critiques made against her within feminist community, she was probably, at least to some extent, under the influence of her feminist readings of

¹⁰³ Cf. Sawicki (1991): 20.

Foucault.¹⁰⁵ Foucault's genealogical critique and agonistic model of power are useful for feminism to recognize its own potentially dominating, oppressive tendencies, because women *are* implicated in many forms of domination and oppression along class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and feminist theory has not been and is not *innocent* of divisive and exclusionary tendencies resulting in marginalization of different groups of women.¹⁰⁶

Foucault's analytics of power, his agonistic model of power relations does not deny the feminist concept, which is important for Hartsock as well as for other feminists, of women as an oppressed group. He instead "demassifies, localizes, the categor[y] of 'women' ... so that [this] concept ... [is] no longer universal category" (Grosz, 1990: 88), and as we have seen, the category of woman or of the oppressed is not even universal category in Hartsock's writings starting from mid 1980s.

Even if feminist critics of Foucault, such as Hartsock and Alcoff, accept the usefulness of Foucault's model of power for feminism in some important cases, there is still a problem that worries them: the consequences of his concept of subject as an effect of power and knowledge for feminism. Their subject-centered projects cannot allow the subject that is not a cause of knowledge, but a mere effect, a subject who has no agency and possibility to change her/his situation. Foucault's position on subject seems, therefore both politically and epistemologically problematic: at political level, it seems action is precluded, while at the epistemological level it seem that knowledge itself is precluded.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Foucault (1979).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hekman (1996b): 5.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Nash (1994): 68, Flax (1992), Brooks (1997).

However, Foucault does not reject or abandon the subject completely, as it seems to his feminist critiques: “his work is far from subjectless” (Hekman, 1990: 69), but he does reject the ‘philosophy of the subject’, the transcendental Cartesian subject, the One, universal, disembodied subject, out of space and time, and outside power relations.¹⁰⁷ In other words,

The ‘subjects’ that are central to [Foucault’s] work ... are concrete, historical and cultural beings that are constituted by the discourses that create subjectivity. Foucault’s analysis does not abandon the subject, but reconsiders subjectivity; his analysis is neither abstract nor subjectless, but, rather, an exploration of concrete bodies and their situations (Hekman, *ibid.*).

Although at this point feminists and Foucault can agree that subjects are socially constituted, the question that still remains open is: what those subjects can do? Or to put it differently: Is Foucault’s subject only a passive dupe of discursive formation that defines its subjectivity, as Hartsock and Alcoff understand his account?

Susan Hekman is one of the feminist postmodernists who defend Foucault’s conception of subjectivity, and argue that that concept of subject of knowledge is not an obstacle for feminist epistemology and politics. Hartsock’s and Alcoff’s reasoning about the subject of knowledge can be understood as still captured by the Enlightenment’s dichotomies. Unlike that line of reasoning, Foucault’s conception of the subject of knowledge displaces the traditional dichotomy between the constituting Cartesian subject, who possesses agency and autonomy, and constituted subject that is thoroughly and wholly determined by social forces. For Foucault, the subject *is* constituted but it is at the same

time an agonism, a permanent provocation to power/knowledge constellation that defines its subjectivity.¹⁰⁸ Hartsock, as well as Alcoff, despite the expressed criticism against the Enlightenment thought, cannot overcome its dualisms, and therefore cannot understand that the constituted subject is only passive within the Enlightenment framework. In Foucault's work, where the dichotomous thinking is rejected, the constituted subject is the subject who acts and resists.

However, unlike liberal feminists who do not challenge the Enlightenment dichotomy between subject and object of knowledge and argue for the reform of traditional epistemology in order to be able to include women, to turn women in to the Cartesian subjects, Hartsock, has a different strategy. She does not want to reform traditional epistemology, but to reconceptualize the concept of the subject of knowledge in such a way that it would be possible to reject the Cartesian subject. However, Hartsock does not want to reconceptualize the subject by adopting Foucault's approach, but to reconstitute the subject along anti-Enlightenment lines and at the same time against the postmodern and Foucault's alternative. Hartsock's idea is "to carve out the space between the Cartesian subject and the postmodernist [option]" (Hekman, 1990: 80) through the concept of *agency*. Therefore, the subject in Hartsock's account can be understood as a mixture of the subject who has agency and constitution, and the conception that admits the determining role of social forces and material reality. Hartsock believes that we should not give up from the subject as the *cause* of knowledge, and she, as it has been shown above, like Alcoff and Braidotti, grounds that belief in the fact "that women have

¹⁰⁷ Cf. chapter 2 of this paper.

been denied subjectivity for too long for them to reject it when women are successfully challenging their inferiority” (Hekman, *ibid.*: 93).¹⁰⁹

On the other side, Hekman as a ‘postmodern’ feminist, wants to embrace a more Foucauldian approach to the subject of knowledge. Although she understands and admits attractiveness and persuasiveness of arguments provided by Hartsock and other feminist theorists, she argues that the Enlightenment epistemology is a unitary whole, and that we cannot choose to adopt some of its elements, while rejecting others, such as its androcentrism and sexism.¹¹⁰ Hekman is explicit that Foucault’s account of constituted knowing subject is much better option for feminists to work on:

[T]he subject who has agency ... is precisely the autonomous, abstract, individual subject that is the basis of the Cartesian subject itself [which feminist epistemologists want to reject] ... Foucault ... conceptualizes subject that displaces the dichotomy [between the constituting Cartesian subject and the constituted, wholly determined subject] that relegates the constituted subject to passivity. His conception avoids the eclecticism ... by describing subject that is capable of resistance and political action without reference to elements of a Cartesian subjectivity” (Hekman, 1990: 81).

Foucauldian approach to the subject of knowledge rejects the epistemology that rests on traditional dualisms and for Hekman and other feminist postmodernists that is the right direction for further development of feminist epistemologies: feminists epistemologists need to speak about the knowing “self and resistance to domination without reference to the constituting subject” (Hekman, *ibid.*: 93). Therefore, for Hekman, the constitution of

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Hekman (1990): 72-73.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. section 3.3.2 of this chapter.

¹¹⁰ The similar argument to Hekman’s is developed by Jane Flax (1987). While she also understands the feminists’ need to insist on reconceptualization and reformulation of the traditional concepts such as the rational subject of knowledge to be applicable to women,

subjectivity within social and historical discourses does not limit women's agency as Hartsock and Alcoff argue.

Foucault's genealogical method can be useful for feminists to account for the constitution of female/woman's subject within the particular historical framework. For example, in the Enlightenment conception of epistemology and politics, so-called feminine 'subject' is understood as passive, irrational, emotional, more 'natural' than the 'real', or masculine, Cartesian subject, who knows the truth through the abstract rationality that is secured by *his* Archimedean point outside discourse and power relations. In Foucauldian sense,

[w]omen's resistance to that constitution of their subjectivity is the essence of the feminist movement. That resistance, however, has always been cast in terms, first, of the rejection of the feminine subject as it has been characterized in the dominant discourse and, second, an appeal to the other discourses that are available in particular historical, cultural situations. ... What is significant, however, is that the result of this resistance is the creation of a new discourse, that of feminism, that, although indebted to the discourses that shaped it, is a distinctive discursive form. It is a discourse that need not rely on a transcendental, constituting subject or essentially female but, rather, is born out of resistance to the modes of discourse that, historically constituted feminine subject. Foucault's perspective on the subject provides a useful way of conceptualizing the emergence of this feminist discourse (Hekman, *ibid.*: 73).

Feminist epistemology, including Hartsock's, can be seen as resistance in Foucauldian sense to dominant epistemological/political theories. What Hartsock does not see in Foucault's concept of resistance is that resistance is not a mere refusal, although he himself recognizes that "[t]o say no is the minimum form of resistance ... [that is] at times ... very important" (Foucault, 1996b: 386). Resistance for Foucault also and

she warns those feminists that "[f]eminist notions of the self, knowledge, and truth are too contradictory to those of the Enlightenment" (1987: 625).

primarily means “to operate like power. As inventive, mobile and productive power” (Foucault, 1996a: 224). In the case of feminist theory and epistemology, resistance to dominant masculinist concept of female ‘subject’ produces new discourse, new knowledge, a counter-discourse that challenges the patriarchal discourses in terms of knowledge, practices and procedures. And this resistance is not a product of overdetermined, passive social beings, as it may seem to Hartsock and Alcoff, because there is a way, indicated by Foucault’s rejection of epistemology based on dualisms, to articulate knowledges and epistemologies that take women as subjects of knowledge without the fear of perpetuation of the Enlightenment dichotomies which constituted women as irrational, passive, more ‘natural’ ‘subjects’ than men in the first place.

It seems then, according to feminist postmodernists, such as Hekman, that genealogy as ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ and knowers, as an epistemological method is compatible with feminist efforts. For Hartsock, on the contrary, Foucault in his account of subjugated knowledges as a form of resistance does not go far enough, because he stays at the level of the critique of dominant knowledges and their totalizing and exclusionary effects without any attempt to give a vision that will point beyond the present, a vision of knowledges that would be liberatory and emancipatory. Hartsock is here at least in part right, because Foucault does not want to point beyond the present, to offer an alternative vision of a new society, but to critically examine the present and existing structure and to indicate its weak points and cracks where resistance can emerge. Genealogy does not offer an alternative emancipatory theory but *tools* to make us free

from unquestioned acceptance of established ways of thinking, dominant taken-for-granted truths and knowledges even within feminism itself.

Genealogies describe how some of our ways of thinking and doing have served to dominate us. ... They serve less to explain the real than to criticize other attempts to grasp it. ... Thus, it is misguided to turn to genealogist for an endorsement of established theory (Sawicki, 1991: 52-53).

Although Foucault's genealogical method is an important tool for Hekman and other feminist postmodernists, they are aware that feminism needs more than genealogical critique¹¹¹ and in the case of feminist epistemologists, they need to provide alternative accounts of knowledge, epistemologies in which women are subjects, not only objects, and persuasive arguments for the claim that women *are* in contemporary western capitalist societies subjugated. Foucault's method is useful for detecting the potential dangers of our knowledges and discourses - their normalizing, exclusionary and totalizing tendencies. However, his valorization of critique over vision and destabilization of knowledges and subjects over their formation cannot be enough for all feminist needs. Feminism needs to create alternative knowledges, epistemologies, visions, and subjectivities against the dominant and imposed ones. This does not mean that the proposed alternatives will be definitive and given once for all times. On the contrary, they will be local, specific, and particular. They may be even short-term, which means that they will not be considered as dogmas but as concrete and contextual solutions in an ongoing struggle to end women's oppression.

¹¹¹ Cf. Sawicki (1991): ch. 5.

So, what is the relationship between Foucault and different feminist epistemologies? That question, as it is indicated in this chapter, has no one straightforward answer. Feminist epistemologies cannot afford to ignore his important insights into the mechanisms of power relations, or his genealogical critiques that make us more careful and cautious regarding our own theories and their pretensions. Foucault's focus on local and pluralistic account of power, can also be useful for understanding of resistance as challenging patriarchal discourses at a local, 'micro' level: those local, micro resistances provided by feminists against patriarchal ones, actually transform those patriarchal relations through strategically located strikes at their most vulnerable places.¹¹²

On the other side, as feminist standpoint theorists warn us, feminists should be careful and not 'seduced' by Foucault, whose work, although important for feminism, is not only thoroughly masculinist and androcentric, but potentially undermining for feminist projects dedicated to committed political action and to the abolishing of the asymmetry of power between sexes. Therefore, there is no one answer for complex relationship between Foucault and feminisms and I believe that Margaret McLaren gives the best description of this relationship:

Some feminists have suggested that feminists use Foucault's theory as a 'toolbox', taking what we need at the time and leaving the rest behind. I suggest that we think of the relationship between feminism and Foucault, as he characterizes the struggle in power relationships, as an agonism, a struggle, a permanent provocation (McLaren, 1997: 123).

¹¹² Cf. Grosz (1990): 92.

CONCLUSION

The main idea behind this thesis is that both Foucault and feminist epistemologists deal with the epistemological problems in a different way than they are treated in traditional/Enlightenment framework. I have argued that both Foucault and feminist epistemologists react to and criticize that tradition and try to uncover its discriminating, exclusionary and totalizing tendencies that are usually presented under the veil of universality, impartiality, objective evidence and arguments. Both Foucault and feminist epistemologies try to explore other epistemological possibilities that are beyond epistemology as philosophical discipline.

Chapter two devoted to Foucault's genealogical method seen as epistemological, has shown that genealogy is a radical *critique* of knowledge, science and truth as they appear within the traditional epistemological framework. I have argued that Foucault's genealogy should be seen as one of the biggest challenges to our uncritical commitments to allegedly neutral, objective and ahistorical reasoning. Foucault, following Nietzsche, breaks with the traditional assumption of the subject as a foundation of knowledge, of knowledge as disinterested and apolitical event, and as something that should be kept on the safe distance from power. Because power in Foucault's account is contrary to liberal and Marxists theories, primarily productive and creative, Foucault provides a completely different understanding of knowledge and of so-called subject of knowledge, than traditionally understood. For Foucault, knowledge is always situated, local and contextual. Knowledge is an event, effect, not a faculty or universal structure. The subject/knower is not *unchangeable*; it is always produced and reproduced, established

and reestablished in its very form through history. Foucault provides an 'epistemology' without the subject/knower in traditional sense, and this move is the most radical moment in his epistemological work. The nonexistence of the traditional subject in Foucault's genealogical work is one of the major problems various feminist epistemologists see as an obstacle for closer connection between Foucault's and feminist epistemological projects.

Although at the end of the second chapter devoted to Foucault it seems that his genealogical epistemological account is similar to feminist critiques of traditional epistemology and is useful for feminist needs to give a voice to the marginalized and excluded others in the western tradition, the third chapter shows that the relationship between Foucault and feminists is much more complex than it seems at first. Part of the problem lies in the fact that historically speaking, feminism emerged from the Enlightenment tradition and various strands within feminism share and are committed to the Enlightenment values of autonomy, rights, liberation, etc. The other part of the problem consists in different visions feminists have regarding the solutions for exposed traditional dichotomies that are built in the traditional epistemological project, which are all gendered and exclusionary regarding women.

My inquiry of the feminist standpoint theory through the exploration of the work of Nancy Hartsock has shown that despite some similarities between her and Foucault's positions, the very premises of her theory do not allow any kind of alliance between standpoint epistemology and Foucault's genealogical epistemology. That alliance is

forbidden not because of Hartsock's feminism, but because of her Marxist side. Her version of feminist standpoint theory even in its most recent form is developed on Marxist ideas of epistemic privilege of certain positions in society and of the concept of ideology. Just like Marx and Lucacs who are her major influences, Hartsock keeps arguing that certain perspectives on or knowledge of the society are epistemically privileged because they are in better position to grasp the 'truth' of the 'real', while other perspectives provide only distorted visions that are in the interests of the few. Hartsock's need to develop the feminist standpoint as an epistemological tool for struggle against all sorts of domination is based in her belief that a power-free society is possible, which means that a society without domination, that would be beyond an understanding of power as power-over is possible. Although I do not want to argue that Hartsock motivation for power-free society is wrong, I do want to argue that her standpoint theory is based on some assumptions that are epistemologically problematic.

First, her understanding of power, which is shared by many other feminists, prevents her of seeing subtle and delicate relations of power among women themselves: women are not only oppressed by men, women oppress other women, and that very fact introduces many problems for Hartsock's standpoint theory. Her 'solutions' for the inclusions of power differences among women, without rejection of the Marxist framework, unfortunately bring even more problems into her epistemological account than when it was based on simple 'two-sex' model. She relies on the 'fact' that Marx was right that certain positions are epistemologically privileged and that they can provide the systematic understanding of the world, without providing any argument that would

support that claim. She, like Donna Haraway, believes that the experience of oppression will prevent the creation of totalizing and discriminatory understanding of the world and again, she does not provide further support for that belief. Her position is, therefore very vulnerable because history is full of examples of the experience of marginalization and oppression that leads to the creation of new totalizing and discriminatory accounts. Or as Foucault recognizes, the history is full of examples of mere reversal of power positions that do not include a change of power relations.

Second, Hartsock argues against the traditional epistemological framework and does not want to reform it (as liberal feminists would do) but to reconceptualize it, but she does that through Marxist concepts of epistemic privilege and duality of 'reality' (and 'knowledge'). She does not recognize that Marxism as well as liberalism shares some of the basic assumptions of the traditional framework, which is built on so-called 'theory of the subject' that Foucault tries to reject. *Epistemologically* speaking, there is no essential difference between the accounts provided by Marxists or liberals: they both believe that there is a pure, objective, true knowledge that is beyond any kind of political critique, and they both start from the theory of the subject. That subject for Marxists is not the pre-social individual as for liberals is, but that Marxist subject of knowledge, precisely because of the permanent danger of ideological distortion, is always there yet: his/her historical details are changing, but his/her form is permanent. Therefore, Hartsock who wants to go beyond the traditional subject of knowledge (so-called 'constituting subject'), brings that very subject at the back door through her reliance on Marxism.

The subject of knowledge is important for Hartsock and many other feminist theorists, such as Linda Alcoff and Rosi Braidotti, because of the danger that without that very subject, not only knowledge but committed political action will not be possible. All feminist theorists that have been mentioned in this thesis do not forget that feminism primarily is a political movement, and all their epistemological theories or accounts are developed with an aim of not only satisfying their intellectual curiosity but providing persuasive arguments for claims that women *are* subjugated, marginalized and discriminated in contemporary societies. The problem Hartsock and other feminists have with Foucault's idea of power as relational, omnipresent and not possessed in part comes from their misreading of Foucault's work and the common accusation that he, like *all* other postmodernists, is a relativist. Therefore, any coalition with Foucault will leave feminists without a basis to claim that women *are* oppressed, because according to him, men do not possess power over women. Furthermore, the opposite claim that women *are not* oppressed can be equally true. However, Foucault, first, does not criticize the concept of truth, and does not believe that since there is no one truth, all truths are equal. He wants to show that what we believe is true (knowledge), is created by dominant relations of power, and that different relations of power will bring different definitions of truth and knowledge. On the other hand, he does not argue that there is no category of women, which is one of the main assumptions of his feminist critics, but argues that the category of women or of marginalized, should be made local, situated and contextual. Therefore, when feminism speaks about women, women are not universal and abstract category that embraces all women in all societies, but historically and culturally *specific* women without any pretension to speak in the name of all. The recent history of feminism has

shown that precisely that specific and contextual category of 'woman' is the only operative concept that can be employed in feminist theories. Third, Foucault does not argue against committed political action, but he does not believe in Revolution – resistance for him is always local and specific, strategically organized to attack power at its most vulnerable places. This idea of political action is not opposed to feminist needs, and various women's movements have been struggling at local levels for their rights and freedom and have made coalitions at regional or global level with other movements again strategically and temporary. However, if someone embraces the Marxist idea of the Revolution, then anything that is less than profound, systematic and deep change seems too weak. Again, this line of reasoning constantly neglects the fact that 'profound' changes may only appear as 'profound', while in fact reproducing the existing hierarchies and exclusion through a mere reversal of positions.

Historically speaking, feminist standpoint theories are one of the first feminist attempts to provide alternative epistemologies to traditional, dominant and masculinist ones. When the first versions of the theory appeared at the beginning of 1980s, they provided at that moment an important tool for feminist theories and practice. However, quite soon critiques developed within the feminist community that point to some weak points in the theory and to its limits. Feminist standpoint theorists are right that feminists must address the systematical and structural relations of domination and inequality that underlie subordination of women and to fight against the asymmetrical relations of power between men and women. However, what it must be realized is that feminist standpoint theories are based on certain assumptions, which make their usefulness limited at the level of

epistemology. Namely, their reliance on Marxist assumptions without providing further support or evidence for claims of epistemic privilege or ‘duality of reality’ (and knowledge) and at the same time demands for systematical knowledge and understanding of the world in order to change it, make their theories not only insufficiently supported but very vulnerable to critiques as well. The Marxist background of feminist standpoint theories prevents them to see the important moments in Foucault’s ‘epistemological’ and political account, which can be useful for feminism.

Feminists in building their own epistemological theories can use Foucault’s ideas of power, knowledge and resistance. Foucault’s contribution to epistemology in general and feminist epistemology in particular consists precisely in his insistence that our theories should be focused on the specific, the local and the particular; our theories are not meant to stay with us forever, they are changeable, dynamic and temporary, and we should use them as tools in specific situations that we see as the moments for intervention and attack. On the other hand, genealogy as a critical method is helpful for feminists in order to be able to see potential dangers in our theoretical commitments and attachments. Finally, what Foucault has realized and what is of importance for feminist theories and epistemologies, is that we cannot get out of power relations, and that there is no ‘innocent’ position from which we can be sure that what we are doing is right and our theories purely ‘liberatory’. Genealogical critique is, therefore, useful for feminist theorists and epistemologists because it reminds us on the possible dangers of our accounts and prevents us to become too comfortable with our own position and ‘truths’.

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