

‘We Are Also Here.’ Whose Revolution Will Democracy Be?

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In 1796, inspired by the so-called Batavian Revolution, a small satirical Dutch journal related the ‘minutes’ of a newly erected organisation ‘We are *also* here’ (‘Wij zijn er óók nog’).¹ Its title may, for all its humoristic and ironic intent, have been the most succinct summary imaginable of the quintessential message of democratic revolts. In this particular case, however, the message was more precisely framed – directed at the revolutionaries themselves. Writing about a women’s association, it contained a tongue-in-cheek statement of the desire of women to be included in the democratic revolts that were evolving in end-eighteenth-century Europe. It served to remind its readers of the democratic tenet of popular sovereignty (the ‘we’ of democracy), as well as of the heterogeneity of that very people. Citizens, it was made clear, have specific identities and interests, and exclusions from citizenship – whether in legal or social senses – easily occur on the basis of such differences.

A good two hundred year history of revolutions later, in which many kinds of democracy have been fought – and died – for, the eighteenth-century rallying cry still rings familiar. The most recent challenge to autocratic regimes has unfolded in the Middle East. The present ‘Arab Spring’ has many national faces and many dynamics, differing in economic, cultural, and political respects – both between the countries involved and within them. Whereas ‘we are also there’ is surely the shared mantra of the Arab revolts (though not necessarily its original gendered message), apart from this quintessential democratic outcry, not much else is shared. And the Middle East situations do not seem to favour the hope for recognition of the heterogeneity of the people – in particular in view of its genders, but also otherwise.

The Tunisian hero Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit and vegetables street vendor, sparked a mass revolt when he, in protest against his arbitrary arrest by the police, set himself on fire in December 2010 and sadly died some weeks afterwards. In June 2010 in Egypt, Khaled Said, a young blogger, was killed by the police, which, again, eventually led to a popular revolt. The onsets of these first two revolutions of the Arab Spring were respectively economic and political in nature. Together they represent the usual two-fold reasons for the outburst of democratic demands. They show how freedom always has both political and economic facets. They affirm the view of democracy as a simultaneously legal and material practice of popular self-rule, or, of the mutual interdependence of liberal

1 *Janus verzezen*, no. 42, Monday January 18, 1796, 293-98. While clearly a burlesque, I hesitate to use the word ‘fictive,’ as women’s meetings did arise at the time – the empirical reference point of the skit.

and social democracy. But one more dimension of democracy is, time and again, in play: the impact of culture and identity on the experience – and the rights – of citizenship. Today we would say that democratic, egalitarian citizenship must discount the differences between citizens, and secure the participation of all, if it is to be more than a mere formal liberal democracy. This formula saddles democracy with a triple agenda. If economy and politics present democracy with issues of the 'what', culture – to choose this inapt shorthand for civic difference and particularity – presents democracy with issues of the 'who.'²

Revolutions, like real-world democracies, carry their proper exclusions and violence – regardless of the very justified ends they may pursue. Such exclusions and violence can occur on all three analytic axes: economic, political and cultural suppressions. The latter should not be forgotten. The sexual and other violence towards women, often in the full publicity of Tahrir Square,³ did not so much define the nature of the Egyptian revolution nor its necessary evolution, as establish a sad relationship with a lengthy Western history of revolutions which reveals women's vulnerable status in democratic revolutions from the eighteenth century onwards. This reminds us that the origins of modernity, or modern-day democracies, might be related in terms of either tyrannicide or patricide. These distinct tales give rise to very different histories and diagnoses of both revolu-

2 I borrow this distinction from Nancy Fraser, 'Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World,' *New Left Review* 36 (2005): 69-88.

3 Many incidents of military, police and civilian men committing acts of violence towards women protesters have been reported. The sexual assault by a male mob on CBS-reporter Lara Logan, at the occasion of the celebration of Mubarak's fall (February 2011), also mentioned by Winter, was extensively covered by a variety of media. For a commentary see <www.feministe.us/blog/archives/2011/02/16/lara-logan-assaulted-in-egypt/> (accessed March 21, 2012). On the basis of various telephone videos unearthed at that occasion, not showing Logan, it is suspected that other, Egyptian, women were also attacked. The beating and torture of a woman by military men in December 2011 was as extensively covered by a variety of media (with footage on YouTube under the capture 'Blue Bra Woman'). The infamous virginity tests were conducted by the military after Mubarak's overthrow. The web is rife with complaints of continuing sexual harassment of women in the Egyptian streets. In Libya, November 2011 a Women March was held in remembrance of the victims of sexual assault during the war against Gaddafi. Their banners read 'You are not alone' – one more crucial phrase pointing to democracy's proper outcasts. See Marie-Louise Gumuchian, 'Libyan women demand support for war rape victims,' November 26, 2011, at <<http://uk.reuters.com/assets/print?aid=UKTRE7AP0F420111126>> (accessed March 22, 2012). Next to the sexual and other physical violence, many problems exist regarding women's post-revolutionary political representation. I merely report (some of) the well-known facts in order to establish the gender issues of the 'democratic revolutions' more firmly than Steven Winter allows for – not to insinuate an 'Arab propensity' in that respect, nor to underplay the other than gender-related violence attaching to the revolutions. An extensive debate in this regard ensued after the publication of Mona Eltahawy's article on sexual violence in the Arab world ('Why do they hate us?,' *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2012).

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tions and the resulting democracies.⁴ From one perspective we see idealised, generic individuals before the democratic law, from the other a victorious brotherhood ruling modern publicity. The public sphere, then, is both feminism's hope and problem.

Steven Winter's paper on democratic freedom is a wide-ranging, inspiring and necessary plea to preserve social democratic ideals over and against the host of neoliberal reformulations of democracy that we witness nowadays. Winter is concerned with the contemporary state of democracy, which suffers from a range of critical issues. These would include, using my own examples: employees being required to redefine their labouring selves in increasingly competitive terms; a citizenship that appears to be either receding into the clientalism of a cut-down welfare state, or reformulated into a kind of entrepreneurship accentuating individual assertiveness and responsibility; a consumerism which has won our hearts and minds as the default medium for the satisfaction of our desires and our happiness.

Winter begins by sketching the two waves of democratisation in 1989 and 2010 as representing the two different roads this democratisation could take: market individualism or democratic equality. The latter, associated by Winter with the 2010 Arabic Spring, would inspire the better road – towards a real social democracy fighting off atomistic individualism. He argues that democracy must be disassociated from liberalism or market ideology, outlining two contrasting approaches to freedom, and a postmodern view of subjectivity as 'situated' and in need of social forms of recognition. This eventually leads him to plead a republican conception of social democracy. In its general intent, I couldn't applaud more such a project of recovering democratic values from their increasingly liberal and neoliberal framings, and I have myself in many instances defended the usefulness of a (neo)republican approach to citizenship and democracy – and to feminism.⁵

Still, I am not comfortable with the premise that starts off and further governs Winter's line of argument: the sharp distinction between individualist and social

- 4 See e.g., Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988); Janet Flower MacCannell, *The Regime of the Brother. After the Patriarchy*. (London: Routledge, 1991). Sigmund Freud, in his *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (Mass Psychology and Ego-Analysis) (1921), used the familial analogues of rejection of and identification with the father for describing mass movements, distinguishing these mechanisms from an egalitarian identification between the members of the mass, characterised by demanding isomorphism and holding off difference.
- 5 Examples are: 'A Neorepublican Cultural Citizenship: Beyond Marxism and Liberalism,' in *Cultural Citizenship in Political Theory*, ed. Judith Vega & Pieter Boele van Hensbroek (London: Routledge, 2012), 15-30 (also *Citizenship Studies* 14 [3] [2010]: 259-74); *Isabelle de Charrière en de kritiek van de Verlichting. Filosofie, politiek, cultuur* (Kampen: Klement, 2005); 'Enlightenment's Differences, Today's Identities,' in *States and Citizens. History, Theory, Prospects*, ed. Quentin Skinner & Bo Stråth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 115-30; 'Feminist Republicanism and the Political Perception of Gender,' in *Republicanism: a Shared European Heritage*, vol. II, ed. Quentin Skinner & Martin van Gelderen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 157-74; *Inventing Enlightenment's Gender. The Representation of Modernity in Dispute* (PhD diss., Leiden University, 1998), <<http://dissertations.ub.rug.nl/faculties/non-rug/1998/VegaJA/>>.

revolutions. To stay for a moment with Winter's initial examples, they seem to form a fairly arbitrary starting point, given the similarities that we may also perceive between the two sets of events. We may want to pause before we dub the Arab Spring – even in its early days – the exemplary situation of the second, social road to democracy. The 1989 revolutions too, featured the egalitarian and utopian enthusiasms of the effervescing democratic and cooperative mood that Winter attributes to 2010, in particular to the Tahrir Square sit-ins. There were the jubilant gatherings around the Berlin Wall, where guitars and cameras accompanied the solidary cry 'we are the people', or that year's 'Velvet Revolution' in Czechoslovakia, with non-violent protesters presenting flowers to the police, conveying the shared interests of people and police. If in hindsight we may characterise the 1989 revolt in Winter's manner, we know too little yet of the future of the Arab uprisings to predict what varieties of democracy will be their outcome. Revolutions are polyphonic; they usually express, as indicated above, several motivations at once.⁶

This boils down to an empirical doubt about Winter's train of thought in taking the 2010 revolutions as exemplary. But there are more basic, argumentative and theoretical issues in the argument he builds from this example. My doubts about the paper's general premise led me to further probe the relation between democracy and the market as sketched by Winter. He hesitates between equating and opposing these, which is the same as saying that he insufficiently differentiates between them historically and systematically. This results in his normative ideal of social democracy requiring a kind of baron von Münchhausen act: it has no firm empirical ground from which to drag it into existence.

The main two problems I identify, then, are these: the pictured opposition of individualist and social struggles, and an insufficient empirical as well as theoretical distinction of democracy and market. I will discuss these problems under three headings. First, I will problematise Winter's *portrayal of liberal theory*. Rather than identifying it one-sidedly with a market approach to society and individualism, we may point out several conceptual tensions inherent in liberal democratic theory as such. Winter rightly quotes Roosevelt's 'four liberties,' which combine individual and social rights, and thus indicate one of the internal conceptual tensions.⁷ Moreover, liberalism harbours conceptual resources that may strengthen its better tenets if called upon (in particular its Kantian ones).

The second problem I identified leads me to discuss Winter's *conceptualisation of democracy*. One of democracy's crucial characteristics, the public sphere, has too shadowy a presence in the paper, and becomes a sort of *deus ex machina* at the

6 This is not to deny that the notions of liberal and social democracy do refer to different political goals and strategies. They might be usefully distinguished, to mention one eminent aspect, as to their foregrounding rights and participation respectively. Then again, even there crossovers occur, notably in the concepts of social and cultural rights.

7 Judith Shklar traces the social side of the claims of American citizenship even further back, see her *American Citizenship. The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

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end. I will distinguish it from civil society, a concept only implicitly present in Winter's characterisation of democracy. I will argue that this distinction serves to provide a better look at democracy's proper, empirical history. It can furthermore elucidate what is involved in democratic freedom, including its fate in the projects of the Arab Spring.

Finally, I want to address Winter's take on the idea of *social selves* in relation to freedom. I can readily agree with Winter's notion of socially situated selves. However, it merely describes an ontological condition, saying little about the unfolding of life stories or the directions these might or should take. It implicates an 'is,' but not much 'ought.' Furthermore, it again poses the problem of how to frame liberal freedom, giving occasion to critically review Winter's identification of negative freedom with market freedom. I will further address the problem of freedom from authority by consulting intellectual and cultural history on the fickle symbolics of market and democracy when it comes to resisting authority. These historical perspectives reveal the gender intricacies of the implications for freedom attached to market and democracy.

1 Liberal Theory: Individualist Premises and Kantian Ends

For one thing, the various bodies of democratic thought that Winter mentions as sharing the same 'core intuitions' or 'the same premise' as to their concept of the individual, do not share these intuitions.⁸ The debate Winter wants us to engage in covers crucially distinct positions within political philosophy, many of which concur with his mission. The notion of socially constructed selves or the principle of intersubjectivity that Winter defends, characterise both the deliberative and republican theories of democracy, not to mention feminist ones. The bulk of continental theories of democracy – and American ones such as those of John Dewey and, arguably, John Rawls – subscribe to a social concept of freedom.⁹ The paper's intended culprit, then, seems to be more specific: a liberalism in its economic libertarian sense, which insists on a radically market oriented worldview where freedom is indeed embodied in, and exhausted by, mere transactions (rather than interactions) between unencumbered agents.

A further, methodological, problem adds to this lack of focus. The paper at times suffers from what Michael Walzer has called two contradictory critiques of liberalism: either liberalism is attacked for its faulty theory, or its faulty practice. Liberalism either doesn't describe the real world well, for no one really *is* that isolated, atomised subject, or it *does* tell the truth about the world, and then that asocial world is wrong.¹⁰ Winter, for his part, incurs a similar reproach. He criticises a historically developed double bind of democracy and market, only to subse-

8 Winter, 'Down Freedom's Main Line,' in this issue, Sections 1 and 2.

9 Though we may discern a new tendency within political philosophy of narrowing its scope to formal approaches.

10 Michael Walzer, 'The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism,' *Political Theory* 18 (1) (1990): 6-23.

quently list the very *different* realities of 'real-world democracies' compared to markets.¹¹ He first tells us that the world is deeply and direly 'liberal,' and then that the world is not at all as liberal theory presents it. This does provide a conundrum, if only in strategic respect. If democracy as such has been captured by the market from the outset, how could it ever provide an escape from that market? Or, conversely, how did we ever get to the real-world democracy in the first place? Some more details on the relation of democracy and the market, in historic *and* axiologic respects, may get us out of this quandary and give us a normative view grounded on some part of democracy's empirical reality. I will return to this in the next section.

Let us first attempt to unravel what is at stake in the democratic critique of liberal theory. Liberalism did produce the real world it theorised, but did not do so univocally. If it installed a certain marketised and individualistic symbolic order, the various discourses of democracy, including liberalism's proper representative politics, saddle it with various irritating imageries and practices.¹² What is more, liberalism contains its own paradoxes, such as its dual foundation in individual liberty plus the equality of all, or its principles of popular sovereignty plus creating government with institutional checks for mitigating the former's potential abuses. One more such paradox concerns its twofold principles of negative and positive freedom that together provide the absence of arbitrary governmental interference and some level of security of subsistence. Such paradoxes constitute tensions internal to liberal democracy, tensions that cannot be finally solved but must precisely be honoured and kept alive.¹³ Neoliberalism is not democratic because it has dropped one of the balls to be juggled, translating popular sovereignty into a fundamentalist individual liberty-as-licence for all.¹⁴ Still, Winter's rendering of the relation between market and democracy does not take this road of critique, and actually portrays it as neoliberalism's wettest dream come true. I venture to take on both (neo)liberalism's and Winter's rendering of the relation between market and democracy.

11 Winter, 'Down Freedom's Main Line,' Section 2.

12 To suggest some examples, besides representative democracy, from the wide range of non-market oriented approaches to democracy: republican, anarchist, pragmatist, or deliberative forms of participatory democracy, communism, utopian socialism, sexual libertarianism, nineteenth-century politically inspired radical philosophy, feminism in its various historical and contemporary formulations, multicultural democracy. From the Levellers, the *Communards*, the suffragettes, the Berkeley free speech movement, up to Occupy, democracy has been primarily a socio-political – and often cultural – discourse, continuously engaging with the legacies of a more narrowly defined liberalism.

13 I might remark here that crucially different answers to this paradox have been developed on the two sides of the Atlantic (perhaps accounting for some of the differences between Winter and myself), and that practical politics may indeed tilt in unwanted directions. Still, both in Europe and the U.S.A. political disputes precisely revolve around how to substantiate these paradoxes. If anything, American politics has suffered from a tendency to insufficiently honour the ineluctable paradoxes of liberal democracy. The best strategy might be to return politics to them.

14 In addition to the 'Austrian school' of economics, Robert Nozick's notion of liberal justice would be a case in point. See his *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974).

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Winter's account seems tainted, first, by a too ready identification of political liberalism and neoliberal market liberalism, and second, by an insufficient conceptualisation of what democracy as a specific societal order is about: that is, one not exhausted by economic principles. First of all, liberal theory is a difficult caption as it comprises many different and even incompatible approaches. The Schumpeterian kind of aggregative theory of democracy, hinging on the calculating citizen, has been long overturned by normative theories guided by moral precepts (in either Rawlsian or Habermasian flavours). These dispute the former's instrumental view of democracy as well as its descriptive pretence: democracy is not defined by aggregating preferences. These theories, in part, hark back to Kant. Winter characterises Kantian autonomy as a philosophical, not a political ideal, and as unsuited for collective democratic practice.¹⁵ But Kant did not merely bequeath to us some flawed pre-Hegelian view of personal autonomy or a solipsistic individualism. He sketched the basics of a political morality that was to overcome mere interest or aggregative politics, and still guides prominent present-day 'social' theories of democracy (both of the redistributive liberal and the deliberative neo-marxist kinds). If this is to be called liberalism, it insists on a state where 'no member should be a mere means, but should also be an end,'¹⁶ thus obliging the republic to embody a moral Kingdom of Ends – yielding the political life of the categorical imperative.¹⁷

Winter, then, too readily dismisses the political and democratic relevance of Kantian ethics. The Kantian practice of freedom is tied up both with moral obligation and, in Linda Zerilli's wordings, with political judgment 'as a way of constructing or discovering community through the articulation of individuality rather than its suppression, for this articulation will always involve taking the perspectives of others into account.'¹⁸ Such an insistence on the subjective import of freedom, intrinsically connected with a principle of 'publicity' without which subjective judgment would be senseless, may be deemed to be and to have been present in some way in all imaginable democratic revolts. It also complies with, or even spawns, the tenet that liberty and equality constitute a relation internal to democracy, meaning that the two principles are to be active in tandem.

15 Winter, 'Down Freedom's Main Line,' Section 4.

16 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, ed. J.C. Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), Part II, 23.

17 To state the point more generally, a Kantian inspired view of democracy as a *moral* practice, which obliges to take the other into account both on the subjective and political level, would disallow the kind of 'individualising' of democracy that Winter challenges. I don't dispute that philosophical humanism carries all sorts of problems as to the notion of the subject. I merely contend that it consists of many branches and conceptual angles, some of which offer handles on thinking intersubjectivity and moral instead of solipsistic action.

18 Linda M.G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 159. Zerilli here discusses feminist practices of freedom in connection with Hannah Arendt's discussion of Kant. See for Arendt's view of Kantian judgment her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

Below I will further discuss how to better frame democracy as a societal order characterised by the non-economical empirical and normative resources it has to offer.

2 Situating Democracy: between Civil Society and Public Sphere

In his attempt to conceptualise democracy as distinct from the market, Winter offers a list of the characteristics of 'real-world democracies' that counter the market's aggregative orientation: protection of minorities, rights of personal expression, and a civil society that provides occasions for cooperative practices.¹⁹ The list is well enough, but for one omitted crucial feature of democracy: its public sphere. Winter follows Hannah Arendt and the ancient republicans in admonishing that self-governance requires politics, therewith implying, but still curiously omitting, these authors' favoured societal domain. The range of institutions he lists, where socialisation takes place and cooperation is encouraged, working against market individualism, may conveniently be termed the realm of 'civil society.' Civil society is indeed one of modernity's inevitable societal spheres, a field of organisations separate from the state, ranging from churches to sports and from reading clubs to labour unions. It is, however, not the only one. I do not pretend to canvass in any measure the profuse field of theories of civil society and public sphere; I will merely attempt to have the two concepts point to pertinent distinctions between democratic practices.²⁰

Whereas in its early Hegelian formulation, civil society stood for the market society over and against state politics, in twentieth-century definitions it mostly indicated the realm outside of state *and* market. The latter is clearly the definition that would fit Winter's intention. The public sphere is as necessary a part of modern politics as civil society. It is distinct from civil society in mediating more expressly the political relations between citizenry and state, and providing checks on both state and market. Let me further clarify the distinction by lending the concepts some markers which may tease out their different democratic functionalities. If civil society stands for things such as socialisation, togetherness, cooperation, consensus, mutuality, shared language, affirmation of sociality, apology of conventional community then public sphere stands for things like contestation, agonism, deconstruction, political action, counter-communities, language play and irony, emulation, power play. Neither, let me be clear, is without its faults and drawbacks, or its laudable and dignifying feats. Nor do they, to be clearer still, coincide with 'left' or 'right' politics. They are, moreover, interdependent. But they do reveal different socialising dynamics.

Arendt made such a distinction when she pronounced a severe scepticism with regard to contemporary society, which in her view had lost its public life in con-

19 Winter, 'Down Freedom's Main Line,' Section 2.

20 One seminal discussion of civil society is Jean L. Cohen & Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

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ceding to an economic orientation on labour and consumption.²¹ She opposes the public sphere's 'political' relationships to 'social' or 'household' relations, which yield mere privatised experiences of 'the same.' What she castigated as 'the invasion of the public realm by society,'²² was a loss of the *inter homines esse*: the state of being among men beyond any suggestion of natural community. The public realm is the space of action and speech among others, which enables the disclosure of personal uniqueness and humanity's irreducible plurality. Its loss amounts to the subject's 'loss of the world.'

If Arendt was too idealistic anywhere, it was in her adherence to a public sphere under the sign of self-disclosure. Power for her is never an individual possession. It only comes about in the doing, among other men, and arises from the irreducible plurality of mankind. However, the performance of uniqueness itself may often be the very capacity to be mastered, especially for those new to existing public contexts. Public spheres are not necessarily hospitable spaces to minorities or women, as both our eighteenth-century satire and the Tahrir Square illustrate. But then again, we may proffer that these instances merely testify to the *disappearance* of 'public sphere' – again in Arendt's spirit.²³ As publicity with her is not a spatial but a political and normative concept, it evaporates when it insufficiently caters to plurality.

Jürgen Habermas, a prominent philosopher of public action, presented modernity as typified by an original practice of modern democratic publicity, which arose in the course of the eighteenth century. He characterises this modern public sphere as a situation of intersubjective communication, by means of information media.²⁴ While it partly arose from market activities, the full-grown public sphere is to be distinguished from that traditional liberal domain of civil society – it was to become a critical instrument vis-à-vis both market and state. In a further move, Habermas also distinguishes the public sphere from those lifeworld activities that are 'innerworldly' rather than politically directed. A good deal of the mentioned civil society associations would fall under this Habermasian definition of an 'apolitical' part of the lifeworld. This is not the place to enter into the details and problems of Habermas's public sphere theory. I will here merely note one crucial feature of that approach. Habermas's bifurcation of the lifeworld into 'private' and 'public' activities was meant to draw out a freestanding concept – publicity – that could inaugurate the normative (as contrary to the instrumental or aggregative) framing of democracy. Civil society as such does not already do the work.

21 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

22 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 221.

23 'The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organisation of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose.... This space does not always exist, and although all men are capable of deed and word, most of them ... do not live in it.' Arendt, *Human Condition*, 198-99.

24 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

As it may well foster illiberal sentiments, or merely routine habits, civil society is not necessarily conducive to democratisation. Nor can it provide democracy with the legitimation that deliberative practices lend it because of their reaching normative outcomes through an open and egalitarian process of critique.²⁵ The public sphere, consisting of both deliberative and contesting practices, can meet the neorepublican concern about the political burden of citizenship, which out-achieves the rights discourse of liberalism. The republican tradition defines self-rule in common as well as individual terms, and makes the citizen responsible for helping sustain a free *res publica*.

My distinction indeed gives us a purchase on some of the problems of the Arab Spring, as well as of democratisation processes elsewhere, including the West. Sheri Berman commented, in 2003, on Egypt's potential for regime change. She focused on the growth of Egyptian civil society from the nineties onwards, following the failure of state provisions. It resulted in a strongly developed civil society run by Islamist groups, covering religious as well as social organisations, providing social life with services withheld by the state. She concludes 'that what Egypt and many other Arab countries need most at this point is not stronger civil societies, but rather more effective and responsive political institutions.'²⁶ A similar critique of civil society, addressing various corners of the world, comes from Andrea Cornwall and Anne Marie Goetz. They review the strategies of development agencies which aim for democratisation by strengthening civil society organisations, and analyse what they mean for women's empowerment. 'The rosy democratizing ideals associated with civil society sit awkwardly with the realities of NGOs' permeability to, and indeed reproduction of, existing political culture.'²⁷ Such organisations 'may offer women little scope to develop their political agency.' They may pose cultural obstacles for women's participation, consisting in the subjects deemed permissible for deliberation, the language of public debate, or deliberative forums asking 'participants to demonstrate altruism and to reach consensus, especially since women may be socialized into a surrender of self-interest.'²⁸ Such cultural obstacles have, meanwhile, been pointed out with respect to public spheres in Western democracies as well. They appear in a range of feminist problematisations of public sphere theory, such as Iris Young's call for a politics of culture that counters cultural and linguistic dominance in public spheres.²⁹

If Arendt alerted to the always imminent disappearance of public sphere, Habermas saw a decline of publicity through its colonisation by market forces. The fem-

25 A useful discussion of this Habermasian tenet is Seyla Benhabib, 'Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,' in her *Democracy and Difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 67-87.

26 Sheri Berman, 'Islamism, Revolution and Civil Society,' *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (2) (2003): 266.

27 Andrea Cornwall & Anne Marie Goetz, 'Democratizing Democracy: Feminist Perspectives,' *Democratization* 12 (5) (2005): 791.

28 Ibidem, 792-93.

29 Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

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inist perspectives spell out a further caveat. While the public sphere might be less prone to the naturalising propensity of civil society, due to its self-imposed vocation for contesting dominance, it is likewise at risk of perpetuating the marginalisation of specific subjects.³⁰ Still, if democracy has discursive and pragmatic resources that belie the free market ideology, its publicity is indeed the category to consult. It stands out as the one cooperative practice that could fulfil the crucial condition for addressing dominance or hegemony within democratic orders. Such dominance may or may not result from democracy's colonisation by the market. It may refer to forms of cultural hegemony, birth into lower classes, lack of juridical means, and so forth. We may conclude that the subject's social freedom, as pleaded by Winter, is both the object of and jeopardised by public action. Let us look further at how individuals' wishes for freedom can nevertheless be seen to dovetail with the public sphere's vocation to sustain liberty. But then, we will also see how the market society generates unexpected angles on the freedom promised us by democracy.

3 Situating Selves: the Vicissitudes of Authority in Market Society

The missing field of publicity is the more pressing in the light of Winter's critique of subjectivism. He offers us an attractive alternative ontology of subjectivity, which is to provide a cure for our atomistic and alienated mind sets, but simultaneously fails to indicate any clear venue for bringing it about. As has been pointed out, the public sphere would provide such a venue, although it does not as such solve, and may rather reveal, the hindrances to freedom or emancipation that our subjectivities are to encounter. This invites to further reflect on the various meanings of negative freedom. As this involves a reflection on authority (negative freedom's pet peeve), I will add a discussion on the intricate, gendered symbolics of authority that plague both the market and the public sphere.

In Winter's discussion of situated selves, negative freedom is again understood in a merely pejorative sense, as denoting isolated and alienated individuals. I would like to point out more positive uses of the concept – both on the political and the subjective level. Let me first of all remark that its political necessity is undisputable for democrats – we don't want the state arbitrarily interfering with our homes or persons. (This straightforward political meaning of the concept is neglected by Winter.) Winter's psychological or mental application of the concept however, presents more intricate issues. When negative freedom signifies solipsistic adventures that keep the other and the social at bay, a democracy indeed becomes an unattractive place to live in. But yet, wanting freedom from others' unwanted interference has been a mighty incentive for many anti-authoritarian politics. These include not merely those directed at the state and its juridical means of

30 Anne Phillips, for instance, points out that political participation not necessarily benefits personal freedom. See her 'The Politicisation of Difference: Does This Make for a More Intolerant Society?', in *Tolerance, Identity & Difference*, ed. John Horton & Susan Mendus (London: Macmillan, 1999), 126-45.

enforcement, or those aiming for marketised modes of liberty, but also those directed towards the social and the private. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, from 1859, could be considered their bible (besides the longstanding, and much earlier, anarchist and utopian bodies of critique). All modes of enforcement of behaviour, whether majoritarian, private or cultural ones, are to be ousted from liberal democratic spaces and minds, as Mill adamantly argued.

How then to deal with the many-sided life of negative freedom? To sort the various claims involved, a distinction made by Philip Pettit may come in handy.³¹ He reconstructs a tradition of thinking towards negative freedom, not from the modern liberal, but the civic republican tradition. Here negative freedom does not signify freedom from interference, but from domination – its motive is the republican resentment of slavery. This specific concept of negative freedom discounts that dominance may exist without actual interference, for being imminent (as even a 'good' master is still a master), or internalised. Moreover, interference may serve the diminishing of domination. Republicanism, then, makes 'interference' – both the state's and the citizen's – not contrary to, but part and parcel of its quest for freedom. This negative freedom concept is relevant vis-à-vis state-related as well as personal concerns for freedom. It can be applied both in terms of political and social freedom, and in terms of a personal, mental or psychological wish.

Securing a social form of freedom brings struggles for such a freedom, which we may translate as struggles against hegemony and dominance. This was of course Hegel's point in constructing recognition as a struggle for moral self-development, rather than as a rationally deliberated moral imperative in Kantian vein.³² The problem seems to be that securing recognition has human sociality as its premise *and* promise – it is in between those two that the struggle unfolds. We want and need recognition *because* we are social selves *and* lack acceptable social-

- 31 Philip Pettit, *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). A similar argument is developed in Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Skinner formulates the republican concept of freedom as a social concept of freedom: 'In a manner that contrasts sharply with modern liberal individualism [the republican writers] not only connect social freedom with self-government, but also link the idea of personal liberty with that of virtuous public service.' Quentin Skinner, 'The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,' in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, & Maurizio Virioli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 306.
- 32 Hegel is often criticised for portraying this moral development as an intrapsychic dialectic rather than a social dynamic. Axel Honneth has argued with this reading, and construed an angle to social struggle for recognition from Hegel's earlier texts, rather than from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and its master-slave dialectics. See Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). I cannot go into this matter here, nor into the respective merits of Hegel's and Kant's approaches of recognition, which each have a fair relevance for the topic of social freedom. It is, by the way, still instructive to read Frantz Fanon's Hegelian inspired notions of Arab revolutions – also 'empiricising Hegel', so to say. 'The consciousness of self is not the closing of a door to communication. Philosophic thought teaches us, on the contrary, that it is its guarantee.' Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 199.

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ity. But what to struggle *for*? We may readily agree that the self is socially situated; we are indeed not born a woman (or man) but made into one.³³ But that ontological premise does not already indicate a normative orientation: it announces the problem, not the solution. What woman to become, where to locate its sites of production, which roads for being and action to follow? Social movements and organisations offer a podium for the development of self, and some orientation for it. But they may in themselves again be deeply problematic as to their constructionist labours and normative framings of the self. Winter appears to imply that merely recognising the social construction of self and psyche is already a salutary matter. But if it creates better philosophy, it does not necessarily predict better societies. Moreover, the mere pronouncement of embedded selves conceals the different configurations of this embedment – and embodiment, for that matter – in gender respect. The solipsistic and transcendental ego of modernity criticised by Winter has been masculinely connotated; women, and probably a great many non-white people of all genders, had different ego-ideals to contend with. Winter seems to side with a longstanding feminist critique, but then neglects to remark on its details.

On that note, let me further reflect on Winter's contrast between market and democracy as harbouring different 'political ego-ideals'. Both categories have again different turnouts as to the gendering of these ideals. From a feminist perspective, democracy may harbour many traps, and the market may contain certain – I grant, ambivalent – blessings. I will end by offering some gender-specific history of the market and consumerism that demonstrate modes of acquiring freedom which, while seemingly following its paradigm, still deviate from freedom's 'main line' as carved out by Winter.

For all the present global market's crimes and sins, the market has not always been described in the essentially narcissistic and alienating terms that Winter attributes to it. Rather, it was initially set over and against politics, precisely for its capacity for calm and impassioned deliberation. Competitive and aggressive passions were, conversely, associated with politics. The eighteenth-century Scottish view of the market rather aligned with what Winter ascribes to democracy: it would operate in 'calm passions' and peaceful cooperation – it was politics that would ensue in a violent mess.³⁴ Of course we sobered up: we have slavery, abuse and alienation abound on our global markets. But history continued to provide gendered symbolics of market and democracy, which render problematic a too easy view of their oppositional moralities.

33 I here obviously refer to Simone de Beauvoir's famous sentence 'On ne naît pas femme, on le devient', from *Le deuxième sexe*, published in 1949.

34 See e.g., Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests. Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). A large feminist literature has pointed out a similar sentiment, while critically addressing its (explicitly) gendered framing – commercial society would provide a softer, less belligerent, 'feminised' society. Also see Vega, *Inventing Enlightenment's Gender* and 'Enlightenment's Differences, Today's Identities'.

The nineteenth century again saw a different – and not altogether dated – view on the market come about. A debate emerged on consumerism, not as harmonising with, but precisely outstepping the liberal subject's rational and interested political habitus. Now the consumer market – rather than politics – came to represent excess, loss of reason, passion and femininity. Consumerism announced a quarrel with the rational, self-interested, calculating individuals that were to fill a proper liberal democracy. Where the nineteenth-century algorithm of consumerism became women-passion-excess, shopping came to stand for irrationality and a threat to masculine authority, a trespassing of patriarchal moral and sexual norms. In that sense the department store, that quintessential space of seduction, delights and semi-legitimate public presence, could be said to have constituted a novel and exciting public sphere for women.³⁵ If anything, to employ the psychoanalytic framing of transformative processes, the imaginary was pitted powerfully against the symbolic.

The twentieth century again followed with a view of consumers as principally passive, duped and alienated. If not merely applicable to women, this did repeat the earlier coding of irrationality, and nonconformity to democratic ideals. It was this, roughly neo-marxist, view that provoked novel, alternative approaches of consumers as negotiators or resisters. We find such approaches of the consumer in the wide field of cultural theory: from the philosophy of everyday life (e.g., by Henry Lefebvre or Michel de Certeau), to cultural studies in the spirit of Stuart Hall. There may be protest involved in consumerism. If we do not merely look at it as substantiating manipulated choice, we can appreciate that it may give rise to specifically modern, and surely late-modern, practices of action and judgement.

This is not to redeem consumerism, evidently; and let's not forget that the department store also projects back to women the images of woman as mass-produced object. Nevertheless, mapping the troubling gendered significations of democracy and market throws many doubts on the kind of bifurcated analysis presented by Winter. It reveals one dimension of democracy's proper, problematic gender politics.

The remarks above show the difficulty of Winter's forbidding take on negative freedom. This concept covers modes and practices of freedom yearnings that, if dismissed, would cause us to miss empirically pertinent struggles for social freedom. The notion of socially situated selves does not by itself provide sufficient normative orientations. What it does seem to predict for democracy is a certain mode of social struggle – a struggle about those aspects of their social constructions that the selves choose to challenge or deconstruct, in the face of diverse forms of social and cultural hegemony.

35 See Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

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4 The Throes of Spring – Globally

Instead of merely contrasting liberal and social democracy, I have drawn out some paradoxes that beset both liberal and social democracy, and that complicate their supposed incompatibility. If we want to defend social democracy from democracy's colonisation by the market, the best way seems to keep pointing out that liberal theory actually is an internally divided body of thought, and is both tasked and taxed by keeping up some sort of balance between liberty and equality.

Furthermore, liberal theory leads to fuzzy democratic practices in which liberal tenets perform a variety of psychological and political functions. It is precisely *from* the multifarious fact of their social situatedness, that individuals may come to embrace some mode of individualist libertarianism. Revolutions show how strong a social motivator this wish may be – for men and women. The libertarian discourse, in the sense of the desire for, or phantasy of, a radical break with certain forms of dominance, may arise with respect to various impetuses and rationales, and take on various forms: political, economic, personal, sexual. It may be moulded in economic forms – against centralist state economies; in political anarchist forms – against autocratic power; in erotic forms – against sexual repressiveness; in personal forms – against moralistic forms of sociality, religious, ideological or otherwise. The question whether we judge these as legitimate roads to social freedom cannot be answered by recourse to one analytical concept of liberty, not calibrated on an understanding of the empirical contexts from which such claims arise. The wish for liberty, in the case of our present democracy, should indeed be rescued from its capture by the fundamentalist economic phantasy of 'doing your own thing.' If the concept of social democracy signposts 'freedom's better line,' it is because of its insistence on democracy as a *moral* practice, rather than a mere aggregative or interest-based form of social organisation. But this may, and should, involve pertinent desires for negative freedom. In any case, we will need to historicise, and specify empirically, the range of answers to unfreedom that the world is showing us, whether inspired by wishes for negative or positive freedom.

My remarks have in part issued from the challenges presented to a 'neat picture' of liberal democracy by the critical dialogues between democracy and feminism, such that have been in place for more than two centuries by now. In comparing and judging democratic practices or revolts, these dialogues are too often absent. The commentaries published during the last year are hardly optimistic accounts of the Arab Spring's potential for democracy, sexually and otherwise. They invariably point to the economic, institutional and cultural hurdles to be over-

come – in very different scenarios for the various countries involved.³⁶ Most of the doubts converge on the problem of how to erect a democratic civil society in these countries with strong statist or/and authoritarian traditions. The Middle East revolts also beg the revisiting of available, and probably the drawing of novel, gender perspectives in such situations. If we want to aid them with analyses of and judgements on their present and future predicaments, we would do well to revisit our own historical and contemporary troubled conceptions of democracy, and keep alive the global dialogues on sexually democratic societies. For real-world democracies may all be defined as essentially works in progress; they will keep struggling with the 'we' that they will represent and empower.

36 E.g., Robert Springborg, 'The Political Economy of the Arab Spring,' *Mediterranean Politics* 16 (3) (2011): 427-33; idem, 'Whither the Arab Spring? 1989 or 1848?', *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 46 (3) (2011): 5-12; Abdelwahab El-Affendi, 'Constituting Liberty, Healing the Nation: Revolutionary Identity Creation in the Arab World's Delayed 1989,' *Third World Quarterly* 32 (7) (2011): 1255-71; Tarek Masoud, 'Liberty, Democracy, and Discord in Egypt,' *The Washington Quarterly* 34 (4) (2011): 117-29; Lisa Anderson, 'Demystifying the Arab Spring,' *Foreign Affairs* 90 (3) (2011): 2-7.