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Feminist Ethics and Women Leaders: From Difference to Intercorporeality

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Abstract

This paper problematises the ways women's leadership has been understood in relation to male leadership rather than on its own terms. Focusing specifically on ethical leadership, we challenge and politicise the symbolic status of women in leadership by considering the practice of New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern. In so doing, we demonstrate how leadership ethics based on feminised ideals such as care and empathy are problematic in their typecasting of women as being simply the other to men. We apply different strategies of mimesis for developing feminist leadership ethics that does not derive from the masculine. This offers a radical vision for leadership that liberates the feminine and women's subjectivities from the masculine order. It also offers a practical project for changing women's working lives through relationality, intercorporeality, collective agency and ethical openness with the desire for fundamental political transformation in the ways in which women can lead.

Keywords Difference · Ethics · Feminine · Feminism · Gender · Intercorporeality · Leadership

Introduction

Women leaders are persistently scrutinised and disadvantaged by systemic discrimination in theory and practice. Despite decades of research investigating the gendered nature of leadership, the gender bind that Fletcher (2004) raised our attention to, remains intact. That is, if women are understood only in relation to men rather than on their own terms, women will continue to be subordinate in leadership practice and thought. Public and academic interest has focused on women leaders in terms of what difference women bring to organisations and their leadership roles. Women leaders also experience disproportionate visibility due to their gender (Bell and Sinclair 2016b). They are scrutinized on issues as broad ranging as their suitability and capabilities to perform leadership roles, the advantages and

disadvantages that women bring to leadership, and the structural inequalities they suffer from (Calás and Smircich 1991; Eagly and Karau 2002; Eagly and Heilman 2016; Heilman 2012; Stainback et al. 2016).

Not surprisingly, gendered stereotypes surrounding women's leadership abound, deriving largely from women's *difference to* men. Women are commonly seen as subordinate and lacking in the gendered symbolic order, with this ordering shaping the language, ideologies and assumptions of leadership. Practically, women are located in the impossible position of being required to perform the masculine, rational order of leadership whilst still being subject to feminine ideals (Fletcher 2004). Any independent notion of womanhood is simply 'a threat to organizations' such that in practice women are subjected to 'the therapeutic imperative of [masculine] rationality as the price of membership and of "success"' (Höpfl and Matilal 2007, p. 198).

To think of women outside of this gendered symbolic order (see Fotaki 2013), with this paper we shift our analysis of women's leadership away from our difference to men, and towards our own embodied realties as experienced by ourselves and with others. Our purpose is to disrupt the dominant tendency for feminine leadership to be reduced to a system that oppresses women's autonomy. We reflect on women's leadership as a site of ethical practice based on relationality, intercorporeality and care. We also contribute

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a discussion of feminist leadership as an alternative way of thinking about leadership and ethics. Whilst leadership ethics has surfaced the importance of ethics and morality in leadership studies (Ciulla 2005; Ciulla and Forsyth 2011), we contribute by considering a feminine leadership ethics arising from relations between living, breathing bodies (cf. Ladkin 2008, 2012; Sinclair 2005a). This intercorporeality (literally, subjectivity arising from the relation between one's body and the bodies of others) casts leadership as relational (Uhl-Bien 2006) as well as embodied. This allows for a consideration of women's subjectivity within a 'system of intercorporeality' (Diprose 2002, p. 90; see also Painter-Morland and Deslandes 2014) wherein bodies in interaction with and dependence on other bodies create political and ethical possibilities for leadership. It is within these relations that open, ethical and embodied relations (cf. Knights 2015) become possible. We put forward that this harbours the potential to liberate the feminine from patriarchal authority and influence.

Feminism has long showed us that changing the culture which frames our subjectivity and our negation is a necessity for emancipation. Nevertheless, the question remains: How can women act? In considering this question, we are reminded of Luce Irigaray's radical political vision and notion of agency: an ethics of sexual difference which enables us to contest how the feminine comes to be defined through the masculine and thus only ever able to represent one subject, the masculine, at the expense of the other, the feminine. It is such a politics that we align with in this paper. In the first section of the paper, we discuss leadership ethics with a focus on exposing how feminist concepts such as care have been narrowly conceived in opposition to the masculine. To address this, we explore feminist ethics as a political and practical intervention that can liberate women from subordinate and controlled positionings in gender hierarchies. This enables us to rethink leadership ethics towards ethical openness, intercorporeality, care and connections. Next, we consider the leadership of Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, to illustrate the tensions that arise when women leaders are othered. We also explore how femininity becomes constructed in ways that both renders and downplays difference. This focus on difference forms the basis for our advocacy for ethical openness based on relationality and intercorporeality. We draw on the work of Luce Irigaray's writing, together with Miri Rozmarin's (2013) development of Irigaray's notion of agency, to advance a practical, political approach to initiate alternatives for women leaders that traverse the classic gender bind that limits the feminine to being the other of the masculine (Fletcher 2004). Further, we consider Rozmarin's (2013) strategies of mimesis, the speaking Other, parody and body language as a way of breaking the bind of how the feminine is constructed. Finally, we draw together the implications of our discussion for developing feminist leadership ethics based on relationality and intercorporeality.

From Leadership Ethics to Feminist Ethics

The very concept of leadership is a morally laden social construction with normative connotations of what a good leader should be (Ciulla 1998). Leadership and ethics are closely intertwined (Ciulla et al. 2018a; Eubanks et al. 2012) and commentators have questioned whether there is something ethically distinctive about leadership (Ciulla 2005). In their recent editorial, Ciulla et al (2018a, p. 2) note that 'sometimes leadership is required for someone to take moral action, which is one reason why leadership ethics serves as a companion to business ethics'. Further, 'leadership is something that almost everyone engages in at one time or another. It consists of more than a position or a person' (Ciulla 2013, cited in Ciulla et al. 2018a, pp. 1–2). Commonly research and theory in leadership ethics focuses on individual action, virtue or the application of rational and normative regulative ideals (Ciulla and Forsyth 2011). Indeed, as Plumwood (1991, p. 9) notes, rationalism and the prestige of reason 'have influenced not only the concept of what morality is… but of what is central to it or what count as moral concepts'.

Critical research on leadership ethics has discussed the role of an ethics of care, trust, responsibility and duty (Borgerson 2018; Ciulla et al. 2013; Knights and O'Leary 2006; Munro and Thanem 2018; Rhodes and Badham 2018) where the ethical archetype of a caring leader looms large (Gabriel 2015). Within this frame, however, care has been very much generalised so as to not pay attention to the importance of political categories of difference such as gender and race. Also underrepresented is any exposition or challenge to the privileged material and symbolic positions afforded to white, able-bodied, heterosexual male leaders (Ciulla et al. 2018a). The cultural association of rationality with both masculinity (Lloyd 1984) and leadership (Ciulla and Forsyth 2011) and as being understood in opposition to feminine emotionality is especially limiting and prejudicial. Plumwood (1991, p. 9) writes, 'concepts such as respect, care, concern, and so on are resistant to analysis along lines of a dualistic reason/emotion dichotomy, and their construal along these lines has involved confusion and distortion (Blum 1980). They are moral "feelings" but they involve reason, behavior and emotion in ways that do not seem separable' (Plumwood 1991, p. 9). The gendered assumptions that underpin ethical and political concepts such as care, relationality and responsibility are, therefore, largely overlooked (see Borgerson 2007, 2018 for notable exceptions).

In an important study which questioned gender binaries in leadership, Ford et al. (2008) suggest that leadership creates significant anxieties for women managers. It does so by

putting them in the contradictory position of having to be both masculine and feminine at one and the same time. An inability to do this means that whatever they do is unacceptable to the organisational status quo where the masculine has long been privileged. Additionally, the problem of not identifying with discourses of masculinity/femininity often gives rise to androgynous images of leadership that are also constructed as problematic (Kark et al. 2012; Korabik 1990; Pullen and Vachhani 2017). Altogether this means that the overarching assumptions ascribed to women leaders are problematic for women's career choices, their lack of agency and the ways that choice is enacted.

Borgerson (2018, p. 3) notes that the normalised and normative gendered assumptions invoked by female and feminine leadership approaches, such as care and empathy:

> create disadvantage in contexts which stage leadership as importantly constituted by male-embodied, but also stereotypically masculine, practices that historically have proceeded with no mention of care […] Simply put, for females, social, intersubjective, and organizational engagement often includes the manifestation of so-called caring traits, which contrasts with varied notions and practices of power, a traditional path to organizational advancement.[In addition] stereotypical feminine notions—such as emotional attachment and self sacrifice, often embedded in care ethics—potentially undermined female agency, that is, the ability to make things happen (Borgerson 2018, p. 2).

Imagining positive constructions of femininity as cooperation, empathy and care suited to effective leadership styles can also be read as a response to urges for women to take responsibility for themselves and their lives. This reflects a neoliberal feminist ideology promoted by pro-managerial feminists to identify with leadership and thus receive legitimation in some form or another. Alternatively, as von Wahl (2011, p. 393) notes, 'female leaders may perceive that acting on behalf of women will make them seem "weak" or only supportive of "special interests" and will therefore shy away from being identified too closely with women's issues'. It is clear that the gender bind in leadership is being reinforced by a bind that juxtaposes emotion against rationality, rationality being privileged in leadership.

Feminist ethics provides us with philosophical inspiration for enriching debates about women's leadership (Borgerson 2007; Ford 2005). Jaggar (1989, p. 91) states that feminist ethics:

> seeks to identify and challenge those ways, overt but more often and more perniciously covert, in which western ethics has excluded women or rationalized their subordination. Its goal is to offer both practical guides to action, and theoretical understandings of the nature of morality that do not, overtly or covertly, subordinate the interests of any women or group of women to the interests of any other individual or group.

By identifying and problematizing subordination and oppressions, feminist ethics offers an opportunity to reimagine leadership ethics by focusing on women's agency and on care, nurturing and networks. Following Tong (1993) it can also identify how feminine approaches to ethics resonate with the moral experience of women in ways that conventional and traditional ethical theory fails to do. The communal focus of feminine and feminist approaches revise, reformulate, or rethink traditional ethics and their deprecation and devaluation of what is understood as women's (moral) experience (Jaggar 1992).

If we map characteristics of care onto leadership ethics we see that it has become a valuable component. Gabriel (2015), for example, explores the archetype of a caring leader which encompasses frequently going beyond the call of duty, displaying compassion, giving and displaying concern and empathy for the well-being of others. In short, love is the *sine qua non* of the caring leader (Parry and Kempster 2014, cited in Gabriel 2015, p. 321). Gabriel considers an ethics of care by drawing on feminist writers such as Gilligan (1977), whose work expresses connectedness, relationality with others, equity and reciprocity alongside care (see also Benhabib 1992; in Binns 2008). Gabriel (2015, p. 323) sees an ethics of care not as an attitude or virtue, but as a practice (cf. Noddings 1986; Tronto 1993). What Gabriel does not capture, however, are the political effects of care ethics, where leaders are expected to be caring and go 'beyond the call of duty', for example. Empathy, which Gabriel especially valorises within care ethics, becomes a feminised attribute of leadership and translates into the expectations for feminine performances of leadership.

Politically, a significant concern is that there is an unspoken feminine in leadership ethics, understood through features such as care, empathy, humanity and nurturing that attempt to control and serve to further oppress women's subjectivity through its appropriation of the feminine within the dominant masculine (Irigaray 1993a). The stereotypical images of femininity and care in leadership ethics risk perpetuating inequalities that feminist ethics has long worked to undo. Forms of discrimination are likely to be reproduced or neglected in leadership ethics when what is focused on is who and what is different, thus reproducing gender binaries, instead of exploring a non-subordinate feminine. Political critique of instrumentalised masculinity and the appropriation of femininity in leadership is required (cf. Fletcher 2001; Binns 2008; Ford 2006). It is this that can liberate women and the feminine from subordinate status as leaders (cf. Ford 2005; Fotaki 2013; Knights 2015; Pullen and Vachhani 2013; Plumwood 1991).
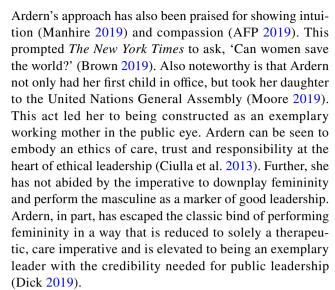
A Different Leader? Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

Women's leadership often focuses on the distinctiveness of female leaders, women's proclivities for particular styles of leadership such as more participation-orientated approaches, or how gender is not a factor in leadership 'effectiveness' at all (Stempel et al. 2015). For others, there is novelty value in seeing women in leadership positions, especially in visible spaces such as politics. The promotion of women is part of a broader dynamic that wields femininity as ideological cement for capitalists where women leaders are 'required to maintain the soft, tender caregiver image on the outside while needing to be tough, brutal and cut-throat on the inside to get to the top' (Miller 2016, n.p.). The visibility and prominence of women leaders also relates to appraisals of their authenticity and scrutiny of their leadership. Indeed, it has been noted that displaying an inauthentic gender performance can have dire consequences for women's success (Ford and Harding 2011; Ladkin and Taylor 2010).

A unique case lauded as exemplifying caring and compassionate leadership is Jacinda Ardern who was elected as Prime Minister of New Zealand in 2017. Despite challenges to her political interventions, Jacinda Ardern received considerable positive news coverage for her compassionate and heartfelt approach to leadership following the Christchurch shootings in New Zealand in 2019 where 51 people died. Heralded for feeling deeply (Roy 2019) and acting with sympathy, love and integrity (Moore 2019), Ardern's vision for a better world gained global attention at a time when world leaders were facing scrutiny and criticism. It also enacted a distinctive combination of strength and compassion by a woman leader at a time when women leaders were often charged with either being heartless and ruthless or overly caring and compassionate. Jacinda Ardern is a leader who took swift action to tighten gun laws and to not name the terrorist by their name. She showed a steely determination not to foster and fuel any Islamophobic sentiment arising from the terrorist attacks (Manhire 2019). During the coverage of the event Ardern was pictured hugging those affected by the attacks, holding hands and showing empathy, not afraid to show sorrow and emotion.

The integrity of Ardern's approach exemplifies not only a different form of leadership, but a valuing of that which is different in itself. It has been said that she 'sees difference and wants to respect it, embrace it and connect with it' (Moore 2019, n.p.). In so doing, it has also been recognised that 'she has shown a quiet, strong leadership, and been very focused on looking after the people who are most affected straight away' (Roy 2019, n.p.).

Ardern's approach has also been praised for showing intuition (Manhire 2019) and compassion (AFP 2019). This prompted *The New York Times* to ask, 'Can women save the world?' (Brown 2019). Also noteworthy is that Ardern not only had her first child in office, but took her daughter to the United Nations General Assembly (Moore 2019). This act led her to being constructed as an exemplary working mother in the public eye. Ardern can be seen to embody an ethics of care, trust and responsibility at the heart of ethical leadership (Ciulla et al. 2013). Further, she has not abided by the imperative to downplay femininity and perform the masculine as a marker of good leadership. Ardern, in part, has escaped the classic bind of performing femininity in a way that is reduced to solely a therapeutic, care imperative and is elevated to being an exemplary leader with the credibility needed for public leadership (Dick 2019).

Despite her exemplarity, the established stereotypes of women and women leaders are not irrelevant to Arden's political position. When Ardern falls short of public expectations in her decision-making and actions, as a woman leader she is often criticised because she fails to enact a version of femininity expected of her. Her female body is caught up in gendered expectations from the global public because she offers an alternative model of leadership such that Ardern's feminine leadership (caring and compassionate) is employed as a strategy which differentiates her from masculine leadership and ethics (Krewel and Karim 2019). In contrast to other women leaders such as Angela Merkel, Ardern is always represented in the political and popularist media as a feminine leader. Her leadership is judged in relation to her female body, especially motherhood (The Guardian 2019). In this way, Ardern is othered, differentiated and deferred, even as a global leader. This pattern of othering continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 as Ardern demonstrated decisive leadership on her own terms (Clark 2020). Her government enforced strict lockdowns in advance of other countries, gave a broadcast to children at Easter where she talked of her own daughter, and was proactive in cutting her cabinet's salary by 20%. Ardern demonstrates relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006), whilst being repeatedly open, honest and authentic in her reporting and constantly relating and engaging diverse, local communities.

Jacinda Ardern has been included in media comparisons of women politicians outperforming their male counterparts during the pandemic recognising women responding faster in terms of crisis and health management rather than in the interest of the economy (Campbell 2020; Wittenberg-Cox 2020). Despite this, it is commonly her qualities of care and compassion which are the public focus, as if the only thing that really matters is that she makes people feel that from the remoteness of a television screen she can 'hold you close in a heart-felt and loving embrace' (Wittenberg-Cox 2020,

n.p.). This is a clear example of how, despite leadership success, women continue to be othered in relation to the masculine and reduced to having only caring qualities. How then might we celebrate leaders such as Arden so as to liberate the feminine and female body towards ethical possibilities rather than reinforce gender binaries which perpetuate women's difference to men?

From Othering and Difference to a Radical Encounter of Alterity for Leadership

To consider the possibility of a feminine leadership that is not reduced to a shadow of men's leadership, we turn to the work of Luce Irigaray. Of special value is Irigaray's explication of how discourse and language have only been able to bear one subject, the masculine subject, rendering the feminine 'other' (Fotaki et al. 2014; Vachhani 2012) as well as how this can be overcome. Irigaray's ethical philosophy (Irigaray 1985a, b) asserts an ethics that enables women to become subjects themselves rather than holding the position of objects construed as other to men. As we have stated before, feminine attributes of leadership are almost exclusively defined in relation to the existing binary of masculine/feminine where the masculine dominates. In opposition to this, Irigaray allows us to ask whether we might 'seek modes of being which cultivate the sexuate, or whether we obliterate the articulations of sexual difference under the demand of sameness' (Jones 2011, p. 6).

An ethics of sexual difference is relevant for leadership ethics in two ways: First, for Irigaray, if we were simply to start valuing the feminine over the masculine this would amount only to a reversal which does not realise an ethically grounded feminine subjectivity outside of its relation to masculinity. Such a strategy renders the feminine the same as masculinity, in an inverted sense. In the case of Jacinda Ardern, regardless of her successful leadership, for many observers she is woman, unmarried and mother first. Her leadership practice or effectiveness is never free of her feminine subjectivity. Ardern is often reminded of her difference in relation to her male colleagues. As she commented in an interview:

> I get asked: 'Do you compare yourself to X or Y politician?' and I'll then get a string of male politicians from around the world – mostly, to be fair, because there aren't too many females. And my response to that? I wonder if they get asked the same question. 'Do you liken yourself to Jacinda Ardern?' And my bet is that no one would. So I actually think that, in New Zealand, we do things our own way (Manhire 2019).

Second, feminist philosophy provides a means to break the bind of gendered binaries and the gendered assumptions founded in feminine approaches to leadership ethics. For Jacinda Ardern, this binding is articulated by Manhire (2019) as follows:

> At the UN in New York last September, Ardern made the case for action on climate change, and for 'kindness and empathy' in politics – a message amplified by the fact her partner and baby daughter were sitting next to her. US Vogue dubbed her 'the anti-Trump'.

Empathy, compassion, tolerance, peace and love are assigned to Ardern as a woman and amplified by her status as a mother (Moore 2019; Cowie 2019); Indeed, in New Zealand, she is often referred to as 'mother of the nation' (Buchanan cited in Roy 2019). In practice, however, there is much more to Ardern's leadership that this. Ardern's leadership is often seen as contradictory, in traditional terms. She is often depicted so that 'inclusiveness' and feeling issues 'deeply' are often juxtaposed with 'clarity and decisiveness'. Her warmth is balanced by a steeliness. Roy (2019) explicitly invokes Ardern's feminine leadership as an alternative to addressing injustice:

> It is a leadership style that particularly suits New Zealand. New Zealand does have a serious dark side, it does have racism. But what she is doing is giving us a moment to confront these demons, this darkness and change our ways.

Ardern's leadership can be understood in relation to Irigaray's political vision of a lived feminism. In this life, individual agency is:

> an embodied possibility of utilizing precisely these repetitions as a political site for transformation. An explicit account of agency would therefore be required to explain how it would be possible for individuals to act not in accordance with the regularities of social power that constitute their subjectivity, and how such transgressive actions would affect the acting individual and her/his world (Rozmarin 2013, p. 470).

This agency is a political way of life that emerges through a lived and embodied ethics that places women as actors of their own life, challenging the symbolic and material practices that violate them. With such an ethics, men and women are required to go through 'deep transformations' to 'meet each other in new ways and create a more humane and just culture (Rozmarin 2013, p. 470). This ethics can be seen in the way that Ardern is able to transcend the political role assigned to her as a woman by connecting, relating and building community in different ways.

Irigaray's philosophy invokes 'modes of action which individuals reshape their social and symbolic positioning and this actively reshapes their subjectivity'. In turn this allows for a 'recuperation of the feminine within the

logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, non-recognition' (Irigaray 1985a, p. 78, cited in Rozmarin 2013, p. 470). This possibility of recuperation is especially salient where women's cultural symbolic position in leadership has long reduced them to a 'mere echo of masculine existence' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 471) giving rise to women having to 'mimic subjectivity' by either repeating their cultural position as opposite of the subject or attempting to be recognised as men. Ardern refutes such mimicry and any urge to become like her male colleagues.

Irigaray employs mimesis as a political strategy to undermine dominant and repressive gender norms and stereotypes. This mimesis is a form of aberrant repetition that draws attention to and undermines the structure of women's subordination and incorporation. It is 'a tool for unsettling… and creating the conditions for new practical and theoretical forms of subjectivity' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 471). Following this strategy, woman has to 'recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it' (Irigaray 1985a, p. 78, cited in Rozmarin 2013, p. 471). Mimesis creates unique positions for women which can be applied to leadership. In seeking such an application we gain inspiration from the three strategies of mimesis developed by Rozmarin (2013): the speaking Other, parody and body language that prevent women repeating oppressive gender norms.

First, creating a distinct space for the position of the speaking Other is required to critique the reduction of difference to a dichotomy, where '"femininity" is the negation of subjectivity' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 472; see Irigaray 1993b). Speaking Other illuminates the incompleteness of male-centred culture, which centres the masculine at the heart of the social world. This strategy is especially valuable for challenging leadership ethics as it creates alternative speaking positions which fracture leadership masculinity. Subjectivities for women that arise elsewhere than from their negation become possible as alternatives to dominant masculine leadership and multiple, agentic feminine subjectivities surface. As Rozmarin (2013) explains, 'the position of the speaking Other reflects woman's status as object, a silent mirror reflecting the male subject' (p. 472). This 'silent mirror can become self-reflective and self-assertive' (ibid, p. 472) and we suggest enables the deconstruction of feminine leadership as it is developed from the male-centred foundation upon which leadership rests. Developing Irigaray's speaking mirror suggests that 'undoing phallocentric culture demands articulating, in different media, its various manifestations in women's life' (ibid, p. 472), and which involves talking about women's subordination, vulnerability, victimisation and silencing.

Leadership ethics sustains specific utterances, practices, relations and moments that mark women's alternative leadership subjectivities. For Jacinda Ardern, resisting the pressure to align with dominant leadership norms and feminine leadership expectations that are assigned to her is central. 'New sites of clash' (Rozmarin 2013) that extend further than what is considered 'natural or obvious' involve resisting ideal images of femininity/feminine leadership (cf. Helgesen 1995). This speaking out does not aim to render the subject fixed but rather, after Irigaray, is a transformative practice through which relations amongst femininity and leadership are challenged. As an example, at the third US presidential debate during the 2016 election campaigns, Donald Trump named Hilary Clinton a 'nasty woman'. Women developed the linguistic strategy via the hashtag '#nastywoman' as a means to launch a speaking position—speaking the other. Nasty women, therefore, does not just challenge Trump's misogyny, but rather establishes sites of clash which subsequently uncovers the harms of women's experiences and restores individual subjectivity in relation to these experiences. Rozmarin says that, 'self-enunciation qua woman paves the way to experience femininity as a different and autonomous aspect of one's life' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 473), and for us this is a necessary part of the transition of resisting assignment to gender binaries inherent in leadership and having agency on one's own terms.

The second strategy is 'parodic imitation of discourses of the "feminine"' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 473). Here Rozmarin traces Irigaray's 'essentialist-like rhetoric' to illustrate 'the ways in which essentialist thought blocks the possibility of thinking about difference as a basic relation, and obliterates the possibility of alternative subjectivities'. For parody to work, the feminine voice is exaggerated (as in the case of the political 'nasty woman'), even made grotesque, to comprehend what has been excluded from the feminine. Leaders deliberately play with gendered codes, such as dress, that do not conform to phallocentric ideals of femininity, and attempts to queer leadership with a strategic emphasis on excess (Atkin et al. 2007; Pullen and Vachhani 2013). As an example, Pussy Riot's 2016 song about female sexuality 'Straight Outta Vagina' was a direct response and resistance to politicians who praise strong, authoritarian leadership and self-celebrated misogyny. As they sang:

> My pussy, my pussy Is sweet just like a cookie
> It goes to work, it makes the beats, It's C.E.O., no rookie
> From senator to bookie, we run this shit, got lookie
> You can turn any page, any race, any age, From Russia to the States
> We tearing up the place.

The song exemplifies a parody that involves 'blunt and bitter speech that expresses a culturally silenced truth about the relationship between men and women, thus making this truth explicit and unbearable' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 473). This mimetic parody establishes a gap between woman and her

social identity—woman becomes separated from her leadership identity—and it is in the creation of this gap that different affects are produced and politically utilised which mark a break in the identification with the social position of femininity. Parody is a practice of self-transformation, and women 'become agents of their own annihilation, their reduction to a sameness that is not their own' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 474).

Rozmarin's third strategy is body language. Sinclair (2005b, 2011, 2014) considers physicality and how leadership is practised through bodies to demonstrate the pressures women face to manage their bodies towards the masculine and how their physical performances are more tightly regulated and subject to heightened scrutiny (see also, Bell and Sinclair 2016a, b). The pressure to 'do gender' in expected ways (Martin 2003) involves cultural norms that prescribe the bodies considered appropriate for leadership (Fletcher 2004). The feminine body is therefore reduced, othered and for Irigaray's body language 'women need to undo the ways by which their embodiment of cultural constructions of femininity cut them from their embodied sensual experiences' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 474). Irigaray urges women to 'cross the boundaries of "proper" speech that severs them' and to 'challenge the boundaries of their self-representation' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 474). Cultural inscriptions on women's bodies and their representation as leaders must be spoken and challenged (cf. Meriläinen et al. 2013). The presentation of women's embodied experiences and their public roles are required to be made visible, including the 'hurt, abused, objectified body, as well as the normative sexed body' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 475). This strategy symbolises the history inscribed onto women's bodies that 'create new ties between their bodies and their sense of self' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 474; Sinclair 2005b). This focus on embodiment casts women's bodies centrally in leadership and promises to be an important way in which an ethics of women's leadership can be developed, as we explore in the next section.

Towards Feminist Leadership Ethics

Recent leadership ethics research has attended to the character of moral responsibility associated with the practice of leadership and claims to offer 'insights into leadership that will be useful for understanding how to better promote ethical leadership and prevent unethical leadership' (Ciulla et al. 2018b, p. 249). Some academic commentators have asked whether women make more ethical leaders (Lämsä and Sintonen 2001) which may be a possible response to the lack of leadership ethics of corporate men (for example, Knights 2015, 2016).

Despite welcomed philosophical work that interrogates leadership in relation to ethics, this space is dominated by the ethical theories of male philosophers and the absence of feminist philosophers. Noting the inherent masculine nature of leadership and ethics, Ciulla et al. (2018a) observe how both leadership and ethics have been addressed in a:

> linear, rational, and individualistic manner such that leaders are seen to possess agency and power, display high levels of certainty and decisiveness, and exhibit a masterly control of all that they survey. Equally, ethics has been dominated by masculine, technical approaches regarding practical reason (Kant), normative rules and regulations (deontology), calculations of consequences (utilitarianism), and the elevation of "good" individual character (virtue) (pp. 6–7).

Recent critical writers raise issues of responsibility for the other (Rhodes and Badham 2018) and the nature of affective leadership (Munro and Thanem 2018) demonstrating that relational and embodied approaches have been called for in leadership ethics. Uhl-Bien (2006) and Fletcher (2012) conceptualised relational leadership where leadership surfaces in the relations between leaders and follows and effects social change. Arguably what emerges 'is a less individualistic, more relational concept of leadership, one that focuses on dynamic, interactive processes of influence and learning intended to transform organizational structures, norms, and work practices' (Fletcher 2004, p. 648). Thus, ethics surface in the relations between people. Nicholson and Kurucz (2019) propose relational leadership necessary for sustainability with an ethics of care essential for unpacking the moral dimensions of relational leadership. For us, focusing on an ethics of care (Gilligan 1982) 'in' relational leadership, is a feminist ethics. As we have discussed, care is often appropriated, de-gendered and decoupled from feminist ethics, or care is employed as a feminine leadership requirement, reduced to the bodies that they are attached to and becomes feminine care (Vachhani 2014).

In this paper we have contested pervasive, normative and normalised gender assumptions that underpin much writing on leadership and ethics. To develop feminist leadership ethics, we envisage a new feminine symbolic, after Irigaray, that contests masculine sameness reproduced in leadership ethics. Moreover, we see Jacinta Ardern's leadership as a significant development of this in practice. Fotaki et al. (2014, p. 1245) remind us that to resist 'an alternative feminine symbolic order, or a new economy of sexual difference, that opens up spaces for feminine sensualities' is required. To pursue this thinking, an ethics which emerges from relations between bodies, as intercorporeality, has political potential. This politics focuses on 'the subject's productive and active engagement with the world' and 'an explicit account of agency is a necessary aspect of any philosophical vision of political transformation' (Rozmarin 2013, p. 469). This political transformation is an ethical encounter and renders

ethics not as rational and calculable prescriptions to social actions but recognition of others—to people and their bodies. For Irigaray, bodies are active and enable corporeality and addresses how 'powerful dimensions of women and women's subjective experiences routinely get left out of leadership; and how ways of doing leadership continue to oppress' (Sinclair 2011, p. 127).

Feminist leadership ethics emerges as intercorporeal through the relationships between individuals including leaders and followers. The key challenge for leadership is recognising the complexity of the intersections between gender, ethics and leadership. Diprose (2002) develops Irigaray's account of ethics to put forward the idea that ethics are not just about rules, rationality and reasoning, but rather originate with a pre-rational and generous openness to the other. Such ethics are infused with and informed by affect characterised by encounters with others and otherness made in and through the body. Leadership too is a relational phenomenon characterised by 'affective openness and response to difference' (Pullen and Rhodes 2010, p. 246), and political potential emerges from affective leadership (Munro and Thanem 2018). For Diprose, politics are founded in an ethics of radical generosity that opens up difference manifest neither in the 'self-serving collection of debts nor in an expectation of unconditional self-sacrifice in the service of the other but in the indeterminacy of generous acts that lie somewhere in between' (Diprose 2002, p. 187; cf. Pullen and Rhodes 2014). This entails leadership enacted without an economy that expects from others in return for your leadership behaviour. It is with this practical and political position that the potential for rethinking leadership ethics as a feminist leadership ethics begins.

Defining leadership in terms of types and archetypes, such as the heroic leader, or particular virtues negates alterity because it limits, controls and rationalises expected moral action. For women, this binds them in a set of relations that symbolically and materially violates them. There is a need to acknowledge this closure to the other through rigid perceptions that render the other as 'finished' (Diprose 2002, p. 177). A feminist leadership ethics orientated around ethical concepts such as care whilst recognising an ethics of difference would need to break with the notion that femininity can only be interpreted through its relationship with masculinity and individual agency. In place we propose a feminine agency and ethics that is intercorporeal and relational so as to engender collective agency.

Feminist leadership ethics challenges the dominance of reason in ethics in favour of a 'welcoming of the alterity of the ethical relation' (Diprose 2002, p. 140). Such ethics rests on collective agency through intercorporeality where ethical leadership is a responsibility we take on in relation with each other, regardless of sexual difference and associated gendered inscriptions. Ardern's relational leadership practice can be understood as a site through which ethics emerges and becomes possible through intercorporeality. From our observations, as Ardern relates to others, she connects and works not only with individuals but transforms the ways in which politics is enacted and leadership is captured anew, not withstanding, critique. Her openness can be read in the ways in which she carries her ethics through her embodied relational practices, from wearing the korowai (traditional Maori cloak) to respect for the traditional owners of the land, to wearing a black head scarf to meet members of the Muslim community after the Christchurch shootings. Whilst symbolic, these embodied gestures carry agency which shifts the focus from the individual leader and the responsibility attributed to them, to what she can inspire collectively, thus carrying ethical and political significance.

Conclusion

Feminist ethics challenges the individualism, universality, difference and rationalism found in leadership ethics. This radical approach addresses leadership ethics at the site of intercorporeality and relationality. Feminist leadership ethics lies in a radical vision for leadership which liberates the feminine and women's subjectivity from the masculine order and offers practical implications for changing women's working lives through ethical openness and fundamental political transformation (Rozmarin 2013). The notion of care in leadership ethics is often promoted as 'humanising' the workplace through practices of empathy, relatedness and cooperation primarily associated with the feminine (Edlund 1992) and is understood in terms of what is 'effective' for organisations. Such demarcations of difference have political effects in relation to the legitimation or instrumental rationalisation of feminized traits but neglects the complexities of different individual and collective subjectivities. The very concept of feminine ideals of leadership becomes problematic, and the conflation of 'humanisation' and the 'feminine' only seeks to rehearse and reify narrowly defined gender differences in leadership research and practices outmoded categories of feminine and masculine leadership.

With a practical politics in mind, and in alignment with Irigaray's radical political vision, collective agency becomes important in pursuing our vision for feminist leadership ethics, as witnessed by the case of Jacinda Ardern. Rozmarin's (2013) development of Irigaray's notion of agency helps us to develop different modes of women's transformation in leadership by facilitating ethical openness rather than foreclosing ethics as an application of moral philosophy that limits differences such as gender or race. A focus on ethical relations rather than the individual leader is necessary in leadership ethics where timely light can be shed on the intercorporeal features of leadership relations that form

collective agency. Feminist leadership ethics encompasses the relationship between leaders and followers but extends to wider conceptions of how leadership is accomplished communally. It is here where the feminine within leadership can be undertaken on the grounds of ethics or equality and intercorporeal relationality in leadership can bring about social change and political transformation through collective agency. Intercorporeal leadership relations address the current lack of attention to differences between groups of women and men within their historical or cultural contexts, and shift attention from the regulative, normative ideal and already ascribed categories of femininity (Due Billing and Alvesson 2000) in leadership ethics to subjective, varied embodied experiences.

Equality for women's leadership relies on redefining a feminine symbolic of leadership and holds the potential to break the disadvantage women leaders experience when they are designated as fulfilling a care function in leadership. This inverts problematic gendered dualisms and as Borgerson (2018, p. 3) notes, 'caring characteristics and caring interactions when embodied by women at work, and in everyday life, appear to undermine positive perceptions of female agency, reinforcing a general underestimation of female potential, as well as blocking access to true leadership opportunities'.

It is through ethical openness (Pullen and Rhodes 2014) that the oppression of difference can be identified and problematised. This leads to it being practically addressed and politicised. Normative leadership ethics further marginalises the political potential for women's equality. Our practical intent is that instead of being considered 'a threat to organizations' (Höpfl and Matilal 2007, p. 198) feminist leadership ethics casts men and women, masculine and feminine, in relation with each other, rather than at the expense of one another. Otherness, alterity and difference become ever present, and opportunities for women's advancement ever available rather than subjected to the 'imperative of rationality as the price of membership and of "success"' (Höpfl and Matilal 2007, p. 198). The crucial and pivotal moment for change rests on a radical vision for leadership ethics that liberates the feminine and women's subjectivity from the masculine order affording the opportunity for changing women's working lives. Such embodied ethics enables leaders to become who they are through the people they have interactions with (cf. Painter-Morland and Deslandes 2014). Yet feminist leadership ethics based on relationality, collective agency and intercorporeality constitutes organisational transformation, beyond the leader. Intercorporeality casts leadership as relational (Uhl-Bien 2006) and the consideration of women's radical alterity within a 'system of intercorporeality' (Diprose 2002, p. 90; see also Painter-Morland and Deslandes 2014) wherein bodies in interaction with and dependence on other bodies create political and ethical

possibilities for leadership. It is within these relations that women leaders can be seen outside of patriarchal authority, instead collective relationships sustain women's agency. This may be an utopian endeavour, but we start somewhere, both practically and politically.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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