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INTRODUCTION

1. OPENING NOTE

In the last few decades, analytic philosophy has been devoting an increasing amount of attention to the topics of gender and race and, particularly, to the challenges raised by one's attempt to analyze and explain these phenomena from an ontological and semantic point of view. Analytic philosophers nowadays agree that an account of gender and race is needed more than ever. Any effort to explicate the concepts of 'Gender' and 'Race', though, runs into the age-long debate concerning which differences between human beings are "natural" and which differences are not natural, but "cultural" or "social". Scholars over the years have come up with different theories to explain the reality of the human categories of gender and race. Mallon remarks that the discussion on these categories revolves predominantly on two sides of a divide. According to him

> on one side of the dispute are defenders of human nature who insist on a central role for innate human biology and psychology in explaining human traits, including dispositions and behaviors. [Then] on the other side are human kind constructionists who argue that culture and human decision fundamentally shape the human kinds to which we belong (Mallon 2006, p. 97).

For the purpose of clarity, I will identify these two schools of thought as the *naturalists* (i.e. defenders of human nature) and the *social constructionists* (i.e. human kind constructionists). On the one hand, the naturalists posit that human kinds and traits are explainable in terms of non-cultural mechanisms, focusing on internal biological and natural states of the organism (Mallon 2008, p. 3). On the other hand, the social constructionists pay attention to phenomena that are contingent upon human cultures and social decisions over time. According to Paul Boghossian, social constructionism points to the "contingent aspects of our social selves." An aspect of our social selves is contingent if it "could not have existed had we not built it; and we need not have built it at all, at least not in its present form. [In other words], had we had different needs, values, or interests, we might well have built a different kind of thing, or built this one differently" (2005, p. 1). To make sense of this explanation, suppose that X is the putative socially constructed trait. In this perspective, one could claim that **"**X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at the present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable**"** (Hacking 1999, p. 6). In the light of these emerging thoughts, one could claim that the social constructionist

interprets the categories of gender and race from the perspective of social institutions (and conventions), while the naturalist insists that natural factors account for these categories.

To understand the nature of these two human categories and present a philosophical account advancing the campaign to address the social challenges arising from these two realities, I will survey a range of philosophical contributions on these issues. My inquiry will develop throughout five chapters.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE CHAPTERS

In chapter one, I will examine and characterize social constructionism in general and present the contributions of some theorists on it. First, the notion of contingency, on which social constructionism crucially rests, will be presented. Secondly, I will present the evaluative and normative components of social constructionism. This sheds light on the view that social constructs receive evaluations among constructionists ethically, politically, socially and so on. This means that social constructionism is not just a descriptive claim; it often points out that a certain socially constructed entity is bad, and something should be done about it. Thirdly, I will examine the different forms in which social construction takes place. I will begin with the account of Ian Hacking, where he presents different "degrees" of social construction. He identifies these "degrees" of social construction as *historical* and *ironic* social construction. Hacking remarks also that social construction could take place in the forms of *reformist, rebellious, revolutionary,* or *unmasking* models of construction. Along with Hacking's account, I will examine also Haslanger's views on social construction and its varieties.

Haslanger presents four basic senses of social construction. She identifies these forms as *causal, constitutive, discursive, and pragmatic* construction. I will briefly discuss these accounts of Hacking and Haslanger. Furthermore, I will portray the agents that drive social construction, which in a nutshell could be pointed out as human agents and the society. The human agents or the personal agents come in the form of individual theorists and human persons. The society as an agent of social construction are impersonal agents and they come in the forms of social systems and institutions, cultures and worldviews, etc. In addition to the above topics, I will also examine phenomena like concepts, ideas, and objects that social constructionists focus on.

The inquiry carried out in chapter one leads me to articulate Sally Haslanger's theory on social constructionism in chapter two. It is pertinent to highlight that, in her theoretical engagement on social constructionism, Haslanger touches upon the topics of gender and race (among other things).

Haslanger remarks that the categories of gender and race form the basis of human differentiation and classification (Haslanger 2012, p. 248). Going further, she avers that these two concepts are social constructs, which have been employed throughout history to advance gender-based oppression and racial injustice in the society, along economic, political, and legal dimensions (Haslanger 2000, 2012). Haslanger's theoretical proposal deals with concepts such as 'female', 'woman', 'man', 'Blacks', 'Whites', 'racialized groups' etc., proposing a specific brand of constructionism that emphasizes how these categories correspond to positions in a social hierarchy, wherein certain social groups are dominant (men, Whites) and other social groups are subordinated (women, Blacks). Furthermore, I will highlight her account of oppression. This will serve to x-ray the nature of gender and race based oppression.

Haslanger's proposal has the specific aim of presenting and exposing the social realities of women and racialized groups in connection to the systemic oppression they encounter. To clarify this submission, I will discuss her claim that differentiating humans according to gender and race (where both gender and race are connected to social hierarchies) is an unjustifiable practice. If all human beings are equal, no matter their sex, gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, then there is no justifiable basis in reality for the practice of subjugation of women and racialized groups that undergirds the phenomena of gender and race and informs in itself the meaning of the concepts GENDER and RACE. To this effect, Haslanger makes recommendations to address this inherent problem and social challenge. Her recommendation is an advocacy for terminological change. Essentially, her proposal is to cast the concept of 'Woman' in terms of subordination based on biological sexual traits; and to cast the concept of 'Black' in terms of subordination based on physical traits. If the concepts of 'Woman' and 'Black' are thus revised, then, our goal should be that of getting rid of women and Blacks (understood according to her proposed definitions). It is also noteworthy that Haslanger eventually would welcome, if not recommend, that we discard the concepts of 'Woman' and 'Blacks' for a new terminology that would be devoid of the encumbrances associated with the present concepts. In conclusion, I will appraise her theoretical contributions and postulations. This would help me to place her work in a proper perspective.

The account of Haslanger's social constructionism would usher me into examining, in chapter three, the theory of 'conceptual engineering' in general. The practice of "conceptual engineering" is concerned with the assessment and improvement of concepts (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020). According to Kevin Scharp, conceptual engineering means "actively changing some aspects of our concepts – eliminating bad ones, deciding which ones we should use, and which word should express them" (2020, pp. 396-397). Simply put, conceptual engineering investigates concepts, which are the main vehicles of representation of our mental activities. Going by this understanding, one could argue that owing to the nature of concepts (which are the products of our practices, and can therefore be defective), conceptual engineering is not only beneficial but also necessary and inevitable. To address this topic, I will foremost examine some terminological issues concerning conceptual engineering. Thereafter, I will discuss the theory of conceptual engineering, by delving into the meaning, nature and kinds of this theory – which, for instance, involve both projects of "conceptual revision" and projects of "conceptual replacement".

The significance of conceptual engineering is closely related to the value of maintaining a critical attitude towards our representational devices. We all think in terms of concepts that we have learned within a pre-existing linguistic community and that have been handed to us by the previous generations. It would be naïve to think that all the concepts we have are absolutely and permanently adequate to our goals, purposes and values. Some concepts may turn out to be defective: for example, they may reveal a hidden inconsistency, or they may appear intolerably vague. Even more poignantly, they could turn out to make, and propagate, *unfair distinctions*. These defects constitute powerful reasons to critically examine our concepts and, if that is possible, to try to change them.

In my evaluation, the theory of 'conceptual engineering' is a rich philosophical tool in the service of my inquiry on the concepts of 'gender' and 'race'. This theory would facilitate the understanding of these concepts in relation to the inherent gender based and racialized social challenges bedeviling our society.

Studying the general theory of 'conceptual engineering' connects me to chapter four, where I will consider Sally Haslanger's view of conceptual engineering. Here, I will highlight the connection between conceptual engineering and Haslanger's project, and thereafter, I will scrutinize

Haslanger's conceptual engineering project. She describes her project as an 'ameliorative analysis'. In brief clarification, ameliorative analysis is a revisionary project. It is an intuitive analysis of concepts directed towards explicating the meaning of the concepts that would serve better the purpose for the application of the concepts in question. This inquiry is Haslanger's theoretical instrument for the philosophical analysis of the concepts of 'gender' and 'race' in view of her feminist and antiracist agenda. It is pertinent to remark that ameliorative inquiry is but one of the approaches to philosophical conceptual analysis. Still on this chapter, I will x-ray the other three methodologies mentioned by Haslanger, namely, the conceptual method (internalist approach), the descriptive method (externalist approach), and the genealogical approach.

Haslanger's conceptual engineering project is closely linked with her social constructionism in the metaphysics of gender and race. From a metaphysical point of view, Haslanger sees gender and race as socially constructed categories. This affects the meaning of the concepts GENDER and RACE, to the extent that the denotation of these concepts is fixed by the categories that have been socially shaped by our history. Haslanger thinks we have to recognize this fact, and admit once and for all that our "operative concepts" (i.e. the concepts that we *really* use in everyday life) do contain elements of subordination. She therefore engages in conceptual engineering to the extent that she proposes to explicitly use – for instance – 'woman' to denote females who are socially subordinated, and 'Blacks' to denote individuals with a specific skin colour who are socially subordinated. What good could come from this revision? In her view, this revision could open our eyes and allow us to appreciate the extent to which subordination is built into our social categories. This may prompt us to overcome such subordination, thus in effect eliminating **'**Women**'** *understood as subordinated females*, and 'Blacks' *understood as subordinated individuals with specific physical features*. If this result were achieved, this would mean having achieved more socially just distinctions that are in line with feminist values.

Going forward, I will assess Haslanger's conceptual engineering project in chapter five. Throughout the chapter, I will examine the critiques and review the commentaries that other theorists, such as Jennifer Saul, Katharine Jenkins, Mona Simion, Derek Ball and Tomas Bogardus, offer on Haslanger's project. It is not surprising that many philosophers critically assessed her project: Haslanger's proposal is not only original, but also potentially controversial, to the extent that it suggests adopting concepts of gender and race that directly incorporate mention of social

hierarchies, subordination and oppression. However, some theorists commend Haslanger's approach, while others offer cautionary remarks and critiques. In a snapshot: on the one hand, Saul, Bogardus, Jenkins and Simion critique Haslanger's engineering account of 'Gender' (and the concept of 'Woman') and 'Race' (and the concept of 'Blacks'). On the other hand, Ball and Bogardus criticize Haslanger's methodology (viz. ameliorative inquiry).

It is noteworthy to submit that Sally Haslanger's theoretical account, and the reviews, comments and critiques contributed by these scholars, offer critical epistemological tools to address the social challenges of gender and race in our society.

3. CONCLUSION

It is my hope that the inquiry carried out in this dissertation will in good measures engender a better understanding of the human categories of gender and race, and serve the purpose of advancing the advocacy to address this twin and age-long social evil in our society.

CHAPTER 1 – SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM IN GENERAL

1. INTRODUCTION

Social Constructionism is a theory that attempts to understand and decipher the nature of reality. Theorists on the project of social constructionism are in the business of explicating the different phenomena we designate and hold as reality. In terms of background clarification, it is rooted in phenomenology and has its long history dating back to Berger and Luckmann in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1991), where they argued that social interactions give rise to all forms of knowledge, not just theoretical and scientific knowledge: in particular, knowledge of everyday reality, of other individuals**,** and so on, is determined by social factors through and through. Many modern social constructionists (Hacking 1999, Mallon 2008) have challenged this theoretical view. Their point of opposition is that the social constructionism of Berger and Luckmann concludes that there is no objective truth and independent reality. Social constructionism therefore becomes anti-realism, given their penchant for relativism.

Throughout the last decades, social constructionism has acquired particular relevance in the field of analytic philosophy, with regard to the endeavour to explain the development of jointly structured views of phenomena that form the basis for shared assumptions about reality. Social constructionism endeavours to uncover in which ways human agents and the society participate in the construction of the perceived social reality. It focuses on how social phenomena are developed and have come to be institutionalized in the society, made known and traditionalized as reality.

Social Constructionism questions the veracity of assumptions held by human agents and the society as to what is "real" or "natural". It fundamentally questions concepts, theories, phenomena, *et cetera*, which human agents accept in the society as reality. In this perspective, the questions social constructionists engage with on a particular topic (for instance, gender or race) could differ within space and time; that is, what theorists ponder upon and engage with in reference to one particular topic in one particular period could also differ in reference to places, regions or geographical areas. Also interesting to note is that similar differences could be observed on what social constructionists

could engage with in reference to one particular topic on one particular area but within different periods.[1]

In social constructionism, the agents that are at the center of discourse are human agents **a**nd the society. Societies evolve and change their perception of reality. In a similar manner, human agents undergo changes and their accounts of reality evolve as well. For example, in the field of natural science, the understanding of a simple element like water has evolved in the course of time; from unbundled descriptions wherein "colourless" and "liquid" were presented as its basic properties, to advanced and evolved descriptions in terms of H_20. In addition, to cite another example, what held in America in the 1970s during the Black Movements on topics like race and colour may not hold

[1] I will come up here with a life experience from my place of origin. In the 1970s and 1980s in Eastern Nigeria, a group of social advocates and some agencies engaged in social construction on the topic of gender challenge and its affiliate matters. They contended that female genital mutilation (FGM) is a social construct and it ought not to be seen as a practice dictated by nature. They couched FGM as a practice designed to subjugate the female folk in the family, oppress them sexually and subordinate them in the society. With time, it became obsolete to raise such an issue as a topic for mass discussion, given that the awareness drive had gained public acceptance and embrace. Then in the 1990s, discussion was shifted towards the demystification of polygamy and towards the advocacy of education for young girls. This cultural habit, polygamy, and its twin social practice of non-acceptance education for young girls were coordinately presented as weapons of disempowerment of the female folk and oppression. Within the course of time, the new message was embraced too. By the early 2000s, the topic had switched over to the political inclusion of women and youths and to equal rights on inheritance irrespective of one's sex as male or female. In the course of these four decades, a lot of advancements have been made and many miles covered on matters of equality and egalitarian treatment of the two sexes (female and male). The social construct on gender has to a very good extent been challenged and improved upon. Unfortunately, then came the year 2009, precisely 24th January, when a sitting President of our country, Alhaji Musa Umaru Yar'Adua (16.08.1951 – 05.05.2010; from the Northern part of Nigeria, where Islamic religion reigns supreme), married off his daughter to Malam Isa Yuguda, (the then sitting Governor of Bauchi State in Northern Nigeria) as a fourth wife (Otobo, 2009). Surprisingly, the man was old enough to be the girl's father.

The public in Eastern Nigeria shuddered in their opinion and stood in awe that a man of his political status, as the 13th Executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2007–2010), and with his educational background as a former lecturer at the University could consent to such a cultural habit in this period in time. Even his daughter in question, Miss Hajiya Nafisa, is a UK-trained lawyer and then 27years old. More incomprehensible was the fact that the President's son in-law was a man of far less social standing and political connection than his family. Some northern elites surprisingly rationalized this practice as volitional matrimony within a religious-cultural milieu.

As if this marriage of Nafisa was not enough social shock and a cultural habit that should be committed to history to effect the liberation of women, the other two daughters of the President also got married to men of their father's age grade, while these men where in Office as Governors of their respective States. Hajiya Maryam Umaru Yar'adua (the President's first daughter) on 15 August 2014, married Mr. Ibrahim Shehu Shema (22.9.1965), the then Governor of Katsina State (2007–2015) (Efagene, 2014). In addition, Hajiya Zainab Umaru Yar'adua (the President's second daughter) is married to Usman Saidu Nasamu Dakingari (13.09.1959), the then governor of Kebbi State (2007 – 2019) as a third wife (Olofofogal, 2007). The lesson of this episode of marriages is that, gender as a social construct still has a long way to go in Northern Nigeria, for it to be seen in its nature, as a weapon of disempowerment of women and their subjugation.

today in the 2020s on the same issue. By implication, accounts of social constructionism are not static but fluctuate in time and space.

To situate better this discussion on social constructionism, I will address primary questions like, what is social construction? What are the objects of social construction? What does it mean to say that something is socially constructed? Answering these questions and few related ones will help gain a clearer picture of the theory "social constructionism", as well as unearth its underlying presuppositions.

2. WHAT IS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION?

As a matter of fact, the idea of social construction is relatively novel. It is currently a topical term, given the quantum of concerns and interests it raises and the level of attention it commands among scholars. What then is social construction? The potential problem with any straightjacket attempt at defining social construction would be that any definition proffered would most likely not enjoy widespread acceptance among theorists engaged in social construction. This is because of the various understandings surrounding the concept of social construction and the diverse fields of its operation. The scope of areas it handles and the multiplicity of areas it has delved into over the course of time and across space since its advent makes it plausible to say that social construction embraces all facets of human engagements and endeavours.

Sally Haslanger corroborates this submission thus, "there is a striking diversity in how the term 'social construction' (and its cognates) is used" (Haslanger 2012, p. 83). Commenting further on the challenge at hand and the problem surrounding one acceptable definition of this concept, Haslanger again remarks that "The varieties of different uses of the term has made it increasingly difficult to determine what claim authors are using [social construction] to assert or deny and whether the parties to the debates really disagree" (*loc. cit.*, p. 113). Simply put, the diversity in usage and application in various fields poses a challenge on any concerted effort to offer a one working definition. In the humanities, for instance, the focus has been on phenomena and burning issues like gender, race, sexuality, etc. The submission on the lack of generally acceptable definition of social construction notwithstanding, I will examine some available definitions, in an effort to arrive at possible working characterization.

Social constructionism evolved as an attempt to come to terms with the nature of reality – that is, as an effort to spell out the *metaphysics* of reality, or at least part of it. In its operation, it focuses on phenomena that are *contingent* upon human agents and societies. A contingent fact or phenomenon is such that it need not have existed, or it need not have existed the way it is. Contingency of existence is there contrasted with necessity or inevitability. As Ron Mallon remarks, then, social constructionists "are particularly interested in phenomena that are contingent upon human culture and human decisions - contingent upon the theories, texts, conventions, practices and conceptual schemes of particular individuals and groups of people of particular places and times. Some constructionists go further than this and defend specific accounts of how decisions and cultures play a role in determining some things." (Mallon 2007, p. 94).

Why would one be interested in the contingency of certain phenomena, though? In many cases, social constructionism projects come with an *evaluative* or even *normative* component. That is to say, the phenomenon that is exposed as socially constructed receives an evaluation – usually in the terms of its ethical, social or political impact. In addition, some courses of action may be recommended in light of the said evaluation. To help place this observation in a better perspective, let us refer to Ian Hacking (1999) and his question: "What is the point in claiming that something is socially constructed?" (Hacking 1999, p. 6). He offers us the following schema to appreciate the social constructionist project:

> Social construction work is critical of the status quo. Social constructionists about X tend to hold that:
>
> (1.) X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X, or X as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable.
>
> (2.) X is quite bad as it is.
>
> (3.) We would be much better off if X were done away with, or at least radically transformed (Hacking 1999, p. 6).

An indispensable condition for engaging in the project summarized by this schema is that, as Hacking has it, "(0) In the present state of affairs, X is taken for granted, X appears to be inevitable" (Hacking 1999, p.12). In other words: social constructionism takes ideas or objects that are generally thought to be necessary or inevitable and exposes their contingent nature – their depending on historical, geographical and cultural factors. Furthermore, if the existence of these

ideas or objects were judged bad, dangerous or damaging in some relevant respect, the social constructionist would prescribe that we get rid of said idea or object, or at least that we radically transform it in order to neutralize its damaging potential.

Hacking distinguishes between different "degrees" of social constructionism (Hacking 1999, pp. 19-20) depending on whether the theorist simply concentrates on the historical contingency of a certain phenomenon, whether they have an additional evaluative component, or an evaluative plus normative component. One can have simple *historical* social constructionism, which highlights how a certain phenomenon is not inevitable. *Ironic* constructionism acknowledges the contingency of some aspects of reality, but also recognizes that we are "stuck" with it – we cannot change it or erase it from our world. For example, the idea of "the economy" – as the system that links industrial production and a nation's wealth – is a concept that arose with the industrial era. It did not have to, but it did, and now it seems impossible to get rid of it. Historical and ironic constructionism only endorse claim (1) in the three-step process. A further type of constructionism takes step (2) seriously, and notes that X – the object of the constructionist analysis – is not only contingent, but it is also quite bad as it is; whence the evaluative component. We might therefore have reasons to change X, to mitigate its negative impact: the project is therefore *reformist*. In a similar fashion, an *unmasking* constructionist project lays bare the "real" function or purpose of a certain aspect of reality, thus undermining its initial appeal or authority. In the case of the concept of economy, the unmasking constructionist may expose its ideological biases, in that it is used to justify unjust policies, and argue that, since this is a wholly contingent construct, we do not need to embrace it as inevitable and necessary. Finally, constructionists might endorse step (3), urging that we would be better off without X altogether or if X were radically transformed. Hacking refers to these constructionists as *rebellious*. *Revolutionary* constructionists are those who take action to eliminate or radically transform X. In the case of the economy, rebellious and revolutionary constructionists may be equated with activists who advocate adopting a different framework in which to think about production, consumption and wealth.

Sally Haslanger, too, offers a form of social constructionism. She argues that phenomena like race and colour, gender and slavery are products of social construction. Here such concepts are understood as social constructs, as an intended or unintended product of social practice (2012, p. 86). In this perspective, realities are to be understood as products of social agents in the course of

social interaction within space and in time. The challenge with this account is that it seems to foreclose the possibility of independent realities and entities like objective truth, accounts of independent entities like the sun and the moon etc.

Haslanger interpreting Hacking agrees with him that the better way to begin the project of social construction is to pose the fundamental question, what does this concept imply or stand for? Taking gender or race as a point of departure, the question could come like this: what is gender and what is race? These concepts could be replaced with the variable X. In that case, the discussion could be simplified and the question could be: what is X? What is it to be an X? (2000, p. 32).

Haslanger recommends that the social constructionists examine the economic, legal and socio-political impact of these social constructs (X, gender or race) to gauge how it affects the society and the human agents in the society. In this line of thought, there is every need for an engagement to determine whether these terms serve well the purposes they should serve, and whether they do well enough what we would want them to do for us. If these constructs were not to serve us well, we could then contemplate either changing the ideology behind them or changing the terminology, which they are associated with. The drive for change is to remedy the situation on account of the construction deemed to be problematic. The negative implications of their presence must not be allowed to stay because it is not the best option. Improvement and upgrade are imperative to help ensure an egalitarian society. Concepts like gender, race and colour are thorny constructs that still plague us in our society – she remarks.

In her laudable contribution on the treatment of the concept, Haslanger offers us four basic senses of social construction: causal, constitutive, discursive and pragmatic social construction. I will now elucidate further these concepts below.

In a generic sense of social construction, Haslanger remarks that an artifact is a social construct if it is either an intended or unintended product of social practice (2012, p. 86). In this generic sense, a host of objects can be regarded as socially constructed: from concrete artifacts like washing machines and power drills, to social groups like football teams or the supreme court, to practices and disciplines like the game of chess, literature and scientific inquiry. She underlines that the social relations remain *sine qua non* for inclusion into these classes of individual human groups.

Indeed, the social factor is at the heart of these objects' classification. In reference to the causal sense, she observes that "something is causally constructed iff social factors play a causal role in bringing it into existence or to some substantial extent, in its being the way it is" (*loc. cit.*, p.87). For example, natural languages and cities are socially constructed in the causal sense, because their existence is at the least partly *causally determined* by social factors, like the communicative practices of a certain community, or the physical organization of inhabited space within a community. Moving on to the constitutive perspective of social construction, an artifact is constitutively constructed iff in defining it we must make reference to social factors. For example, we define professors by making reference to social institutions like universities; or we define wives or husbands by making reference to the social institution of marriage. As to *discursive or linguistic* social construction, an artifact is constructed iff attributions of properties to it (including self-attributions) contribute to the substantial presentation of the way it is. In this perspective, our individual sense of self could be held as socially constructed because social attributions contribute to making us the individuals we are today. One of the significant notes to keep in mind in discussing discursive social construction is that this concept "depends on there being descriptions, distinctions and classifications at hand whose attribution to things makes a difference – [For instance] I am the way I am today because people have had the linguistic and conceptual resources to describe me as for example, "smart" or "stupid" "attractive" or "ugly" (*loc. cit.*, p. 89).

The last but not the least kind of social construction is the *pragmatic construction*. This notion applies not so much to objects, like artifacts or institutions, but rather to conceptual distinctions used to classify or categorize objects. In her explanation of pragmatic construction, Haslanger claims that "a classificatory apparatus (be it a full blown classification scheme or just a conceptual distinction or descriptive term) is socially constructed just in case its use is determined, at least in part, by social factors" (*loc. cit.*, p. 90).

Pragmatic construction could come in two ways: a distinction could be either weakly or strongly pragmatically constructed. On the one hand, "a distinction is weakly pragmatically constructed if social factors only partly determine our use of it. [On the other hand], a distinction is strongly pragmatically constructed if social factors *wholly* determine our use of it, and it fails to represent accurately any fact of the matter" (*loc. cit.*, p. 90). To explain further the meaning here, a given distinction is pragmatically constructed in its weak form if the usage of the distinction in question

is tied to contingent historical and cultural factors and influences on the thing in itself. For example, Haslanger deems the distinction between males and females weakly pragmatically constructed, because it depends on historical and cultural factors, which however, apply to a pre-existing biological distinction (between the different anatomies and reproductive roles). Conversely, when social factors alone dictate our usage of a particular distinction under consideration, then the distinction is said to be pragmatically constructed in its strong form. Haslanger brings the concept of "cool" as an example, for coolness tracks no features of the world, but just social standards of communities, which are subjected to historical and geographical variations.

From the foregoing, the centrality of distinctions, descriptive terms or classificatory schemes could be observed in connection with pragmatic construction. The degree of the influence(s) that historical and social factors (like values, interests etc.) exert on the choices of the descriptive terms or distinctions in describing a phenomenon determines the difference between strong or weak pragmatic construction. In short, the difference between weak and strong social constructs could be put as follows. Weak social constructs are dependent on both institutional facts (like cultures and conventions), and on fundamental phenomena (like, say, quarks). Strong social constructs, on the other hand, only depend on human knowledge that has been constructed by the society. All constructs, whether strong or weak, exert their influences on the human agent within the society in one way or the other.

It is also pertinent to highlight that the theorists of social construction are not without criticisms. However, it is not out of place if they encounter hit backs through criticisms given that over the course of their theoretical exercise and advocacies, they rattle and agitate naturalists who hold the ideas they critically examine as natural. Among others criticisms, naturalists maintain that social constructionists pay less attention to the contributions made by physical and biological sciences. The bottom of the disagreement between social constructionists and naturalists is linked to the "nature and nurture" debate. Social construction theorists retort that social phenomena and traits are both socially and culturally inspired rather than solely biologically transmitted.

To sum up, in this section I have characterized social construction in general. The first element I have introduced is *contingency*. A socially constructed object is an object whose existence (or existence the way it is) is contingent, that is, it could not have existed, or it could have existed in a

different way. The second aspect I have touched upon has to do with *the point of* showing that something is socially constructed. As Hacking notes, often, social constructionists do not just make historical claims; they also stress that the socially constructed entity at issue is quite bad as it is (*evaluative* claim); and some of them also add that we would be better off without it (normative claim). The third aspect I have covered has to do with the types of social construction. Following Haslanger, several modes of social construction have been surveyed: *causal*, *constitutive* and *discursive construction* all model different ways in which an object could be socially constructed. Pragmatic social construction – by contrast – concerns conceptual distinctions and classifications, whose construction could either be grounded into objective aspects of reality (*weak* pragmatic construction), or entirely be the product of social interactions (strong pragmatic construction).

3. OBJECTIVE OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

The theorists engaged with social construction take it upon themselves to expose as much as possible, intelligently too and constructively the diverse social constructs, phenomena, ideas and objects as they are constitutively. They aim to unearth the essential constitution and fundamental knowledge concerning the idea and phenomenon in question. In so doing, they demystify any idea or social construct that could be seen and held as natural to showcase its nature as a product of social construction. In establishing that these phenomena are social constructs and not natural entities and ideas, it becomes evident that they are within the circle of our control as human agents.

Given the foregoing, these theorists advocate that in a situation where such social constructs do not serve the purposes for which we would want them; or where they constitute elements of injustice; or even advance oppression or inequality in any form, that then, there is need to push for a change. Such change may have to affect the conceptual devices that allow humans to trace politically pernicious distinctions. Two possible avenues in order to bring about such change are, (i) a shift in terminology, with the elimination of the problematic terms and the promotion of terms that can further social justice; (ii) a semantic change to the current terminology; this implies keeping certain words, but revising the concepts they express. The end goal here is to contribute to the creation of a framework for engendering a more just world (Haslanger 2000). Social constructionists maintain that their exercise is very essential for the robust and positive evolution of the society. In this line of thought, it is pertinent to keep in mind that the tragedy of social constructs that engender inequality and injustice is that, in the course of time, they come to be accepted within the society

as natural, and some traditionalists would even defend them as ideas and theories that are sacrosanct.

Having made a perusal of the understanding surrounding the concept social construction, I will look at how this theory operates. In this perspective, I will consider questions like: "What are the objects of social construction?", "What could it be like to be constructed?", "What does it mean to remark that something is socially constructed?" and so on.

4. THE OBJECTS OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

To address adequately the notion "the objects of social construction", it would be yielding to examine the question: "What is constructed?" In so doing, the objects of social construction would be sufficiently evident and well showcased. On this forgoing, it is significant to remark that, the question "What is constructed?" could be very tempting for "radical" social constructionists and their disciples. This is because of their straightjacket assertion that reality is a social construct. There is a tendency for them to submit that everything including quarks, the sun, the moon, human kinds as well as aliens, are constructed (one example of such radical constructionist could be Nelson Goodman). In this, they are opposed by what we might call "conventional" social constructionists, who hold fast to the belief that many elements of reality that are studied by the natural sciences – such as stars, planets, bacteria and quarks –, are not, or not totally, socially constructed (Haslanger 2012). However, both radical and conventional social constructionists agree that *some* objects are indeed socially constructed. Particularly, objects of construction are knowledge, facts, human nature etc. More precisely, ideas, concepts, phenomena, theories and all products of the interaction between human agents and the society in a social milieu are constructed.

A parallel distinction within the constructionist camp concerns the contrast between the so-called *global* and *local* constructionism. While the *global* constructionists (Mallon 2008, p. 3) hold that everything, every phenomenon and object is socially constructed; local constructionist (*ibid.*) endorse a claim with a narrower scope, emphasizing that only particular facts and objects are socially constructed. Global constructionism no doubt is very controversial because it would demand defense of one's theory on every particular object and concept. Global constructionism could be reminded that it commits a fundamental error bearing on the principle of

overgeneralization. Local constructionism is more suitable because what it identifies as objects and concepts of social construction are more plausible: for example, gender and race.

In view of the recent philosophical developments, the objects of social construction could also be divided into two categories. Mallon (2007) submits that, on the one hand, constructionists focus on our ways of thinking about, representing or modeling the world. This perspective results in constructionist positions on, for example, theories and concepts. On the other hand, constructionists focus on the world itself, where this focus has produced constructionist positions on, for example, human kinds. It is pertinent to note that the nature of claims by social constructionists on some objects could sometimes have different implications depending upon the different objects at which they are directed. Sometimes claims by social constructionists on some objects could have divisive implications too. This is because social construction has been directed to really diverse and complex objects and ideas – ranging from theories (within the so-called "science wars" controversy) to "human nature and human kinds (within the human nature wars" debate). One thread that runs through the discussions of constructionism within the circles of science wars and human nature wars is the contention on what constitutes the phenomena they discuss, and in particular whether these phenomena are natural or socially constituted".

The so-called "science wars" witness a clash between social constructionists about theories and philosophers with more realist inclinations. "Science wars" theorists have engaged in examining the social factors influencing both the production of scientific theories, and of the facts those theories purport to represent; they have therefore emphasized the failure of accounts of scientific rationality or realism (Kukla 2000). As Mallon puts it, the crux of the science-war controversy was the "thesis that scientific theories are not the 'natural or inevitable' results of the naked facts or the data. The theories might have been different had human culture or decision been different" (2007, p. 95).

"Human nature wars" theorists are not less controversial in their enterprise. Naturalists defend that human traits (emotions, behaviours) have a biological and psychological explanation. Human kinds (race, gender) constructionists defend that these kinds are products of the interaction between human agents and the society in a social milieu. In this circle of philosophical debate, the proponents of phenomena like gender and race as social constructs feature prominently on the one

hand (Haslanger 2000, 2012); and, on the other hand, the propounders of naturalism about gender, colour and race, which are held to be more or less explainable by appealing to internal, biological or natural states of the organisms in question (Mallon 2008).

Theories of social constructionists could have a far-reaching impact. In this line of thought, I could in extrapolation note that the social construction of race and blackness have led to oppressive and negative aspects observable in the everyday situation of persons of colour in the United States of America. Numerous examples could be cited: the daily police shooting of blacks on the streets, for issues as incomprehensible as the suspicion that they might have committed a crime; as well as the state-endorsed violation of their basic human rights and privileges, like the administrative policy of stop-and-frisk led Mike Bloomberg in his days as the Mayor of New York City (years 2001-2013). Going by the media bashing that Mike Bloomberg received during his campaign to emerge as the Presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in the 2020 Presidential election, one could see this policy contributing in damaging his political career in this his bid for the Office of the President of the United States of America and thus his early withdrawal from the race.

Constructionism could also provide the theoretical tools to engage with the state-coordinated policy of the days of Eugenics Movement in the United States in the early 1920s, where White House policy-makers endorsed the gene regulation of Blacks, on the supposition that their genes contained traits of feeble-mindedness. Even the literary world was not spared from this bias in those days. For instance, a famous writer, Henry Herbert Goddard in his 1912 book, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness*, cited the myth of gene and heredity to push for the rejection of Blacks in the United States. Unfortunately, the myth of *Kallikak* enjoyed wide literature reviews and newspaper headlines then (Berkowitz 1996; Krimsky & Gruber [eds.] 2013). The theory of *kind* constructionism would oppose these contentions, holding that race is not explainable by biological or natural facts like genetic differences, but rather grounded in and constituted by social factors and theories (Haslanger 2012, Taylor 2013 etc.).

To sum up, in this session I have dealt with the objects of social construction. On the one hand, radical constructionism claims that the *whole reality* is a social construct, while conventional constructionism merely accepts that some objects are socially constructed (for instance, knowledge or gender). Similarly, the global constructionist would say that every object is socially constructed,

while the local constructionism would restrict their claim to some domain or area. Furthermore, social constructionism could concern both representational devices (concepts, theories) and worldly things (e.g. human kinds). Finally, I closed the session by highlighting how theories of social construction could be used to frame historical events or phenomena and to critique the cultural schemes that seem to underlie them.

5. THE AGENTS OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

Having identified the objects of social construction (like ideas, phenomena, concepts, theories, knowledge, and so on), I will now move on to examine and discuss the question: Who are the agents responsible for the construction of such entities? Gleaning through the thoughts of theorists into social constructionism (Haslanger 2000, 2012; Mallon 2008), one could point out the agents of social constructionism as *human agents* and *the society*. This account could better be presented in terms of personal (individual human persons and groups) and impersonal (institutions, cultures, conventions, systems, worldviews) agents of social constructionism (Mallon 2008).

The impersonal agents' view of social constructionism understands social institutions and cultural environment as playing causal roles in social constructionism. In this set-up, the role social factors play is causal, in bringing into existence whatever is constructed or at least to some substantial extent in bringing the construct into existence the way it is. This implies that institutions, cultures, conventions, systems are assigned causal roles in the production of ideas, concepts and phenomena.

Mallon (2008) cites, as an example of impersonal agent of social construction, the role played by a subject's background theories in perceiving what he or she perceives. As Mallon puts it "the claim that what we perceive is determined by our background theories emphasizes an impersonal causal agent – culture – in determining some phenomena" (2008, §1.1). Thus Thomas Kuhn (1962, 1970) as cited by Ron Mallon, for example, submits that "what a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see" (2008, p. 2). Impersonal agents of social constructionism could also be seen as playing active roles in non-representational ideas like sex-differentiated-behaviour (Mallon 2008). The holders of this view maintain that sex-differentiated-behaviour exists on its own, but the causes of this differentiation are not explainable by means of biological and natural factors, but rather via social factors arising from different conceptions of sex. The conventional scene in the family comes to

mind here, where the female child could easily toll the traits and make home chores choices of the mother, while the male child copies the father on account of what they see and are socially nudged into.

The personal agents' view of social constructionism emphasizes the choices that the personal agents play in the bid to socially construct phenomena. A typical example is the construction of quarks. Here we encounter the roles of the efforts and choices made by scientists and writers in "inventing" these entities (Hacking 1999, Mallon 2008, Pickering 1984).

The role of the personal agents' efforts and choices here could be non-deliberate, non-intended or otherwise. In some cases, it is completely conscious and deliberate. A very good example in this instance is the case of racial prejudice in America or the global gender challenge. There is every reason to hold that the phenomena of gender and race were constructed and sustained as tools of subjugation of a particular human kind (people of colour, females) and to bestow privilege upon another human group (white people, males) (Haslanger 2012). While I acknowledge that it is impossible to trace this intention to *particular* individuals, it seems to me undeniable that it is the choices and actions of individuals taken *one by one* that determine and maintain oppression and subjugation. In some cases, the oppressive meaning of the agent's action may not be evident to the agent him- or herself; in other cases, the agent may be aware of the oppressive significance of their deeds and acts nevertheless – perhaps because they would profit from that same oppression. By implication, one could aver that some personal agents of social construction have, on some occasions, an eye on power, interest and privilege.

Furthermore, one could hypothesize that socially constructed phenomena that are deliberate are most of the times very entrenched in the culture and mentality of a community and are therefore difficult to change or improve upon. *Vice versa*, non-deliberate constructs are mostly easier to correct, change or handle, especially when the advantages they serve and foster do not imply very high stakes to the powers that be in the society.

6. WHAT IS IT TO BE CONSTRUCTED?

What is the ontological status of something that is socially constructed? In this respect, the contrast between existing necessarily and existing in a mere contingent fashion becomes relevant. Mallon

maintains "that social constructionists are particularly interested in phenomena [objects, ideas, concepts] that are contingent upon human culture and human decisions – contingent upon the theories, texts, conventions, practices and conceptual schemes of particular individuals and groups of people in particular places and times" (2007, p. 94). Part of the reason for this particular interest is because they see social constructionism as a better tool and means to explain these phenomena as against other theories. This view serves well the interest and goal of social constructionists with political or social targets. For them, "revealing the contingency of a thing on our culture or decisions suggests that we might alter that thing through future social choices. It also may indicate our responsibility to do so if the thing in question is unjust" (*ibid*).

Mallon remarks that Ian Hacking in his theory is advocating that the better way to appreciate and advance in constructionism could be to ask the basic question, what is X? What's the point of X? He noted that the claim that X is a construction indicates that X need not have existed, or that X need not have existed the way it is at the moment, or that X is not inevitable (*ibid*). Mallon observes further that "The denial of inevitability [that] Hacking points to only makes sense against a background view about what it is that might have made the difference" (*ibid*). In this perspective, Mallon is reiterating that in constructing a phenomenon we bring it into theoretical existence. In this exercise, there could be no claim to absolute necessity for its existence.

Boghossian corroborating the inputs made by Hacking and Haslanger above emphasized the role of the social system with respect to the social construct. He remarks thus:

> To say of something that it is socially constructed is to emphasize its dependence on contingent aspects of our social selves. It is to say: This thing could not have existed had we not built it; and we need not have built it at all, at least not in its present form. Had we been a different kind of society, had we had different needs, values, or interests, we might well have built a different kind of thing, or built this one differently. The inevitable contrast is with a naturally existing object, something that exists independently of us and which we did not have a hand in shaping. There are certainly many things, and facts about them, that are socially constructed in the sense specified by this core idea: money, citizenship and newspapers, for example. None of these things could have existed without society; and each of them could have been constructed differently had we so chosen (2005, p. 1).

By the implication of the foregoing, it becomes evident that what is it to be constructed owes its being to the social forces and its system.

In conclusion, having surveyed the nature of constructionism, and explored the several forms that social construction takes, it is important to signal that my engagement on this research work would pay particular attention to the theoretical thoughts and developments surrounding the concepts of ‘gender’ and ‘race’ as articulated by social constructionism. I am to underscore the ways in which these social challenges still reside with us, and proffer some measures to address them, with the goal of promoting justice in our time and beyond. In the next chapter, I will concentrate on the particular theories articulated by Sally Haslanger on gender and race.

CHAPTER 2 – HASLANGER'S SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

1. INTRODUCTION

Sally Haslanger in her theoretical engagement on social constructionism, treats among other topics, the issues of gender and race. These two terms sit at the bottom of human differentiation and classifications (Haslanger 2012, p. 248). It is worthy of note that human species in every era, no matter the geographical location, space and time, share some basic intrinsic qualities, inseparable characterizations, observable similarities and differences. Conventionally, human beings have been categorized in differentiation within diverse schemata, of which the frames of male or female (loosely couched as gender), origin (could be loosely framed as race), and age, have been the most popular[2]. By the implications of data at hand, of these schemata, those of gender and race have had the most inglorious application both legally, politically, socially and even religiously to be explored to institute, advance and entrench injustice in the society.

Sally Haslanger in her philosophical exercise in social constructionism examined the nature of the categories of gender and race, as well as their application, and scrutinized how they function within the society in various strata and arrived at a critical conclusion that these topics are fundamentally no doubt social constructs. The problem therein in her understanding lies on the ground that these two terms, gender and race, as social constructs, are employed as tools for perpetuating injustice and advancing unhealthy social relations (Haslanger 2012). Commenting further on these topics, she noted that these observations have significant bearing on the social standing of the human person (*ibid*).

Having made these preliminary remarks, I will now explore the contributions of Haslanger to social constructionism with gender and race as working tools and examine how she came to the critical conclusion above as well as its implications, and then look at her suggestions as the way-forward. As a matter of my procedure in advancing my inquiry here, I will handle together the common significant parallels on these subjects, gender and race, and also treat their peculiarities. By

[2] Haslanger in her preliminary remark while elaborating on these three elements observed: "If I mention that I met an interesting person while waiting for the subway last week, a first step to understanding the nature of our contact would be to identify whether the person was a man or woman, what race they were. (Also especially useful would be their relative age)" (2012, p.248). In line with her remark here, one sees these groupings at work in formal settings like in official documentation, where classifications based on age, gender/sex, and place of birth come to play.

exploring their commonalities or what they have in common, so to say, I intend to provide some valuable resources and contents for thinking about a wide range of issues surrounding these topics. Then by singling them out to treat individually, I also would like to take care of their unique content and avoid the loopholes and dangers inherent in drawing close analogies between them (Haslanger 2000, p. 32). To capture properly the philosophical contributions of Sally Haslanger on her project, I will foremost examine her goals and objectives in treating these topics, and thereafter present her philosophical thoughts on them in diverse subtitles.

2. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF HASLANGER ON GENDER AND RACE

Sally Haslanger in her theoretical approach was very unambiguous. She avers that the topics, gender and race, are social constructs. She endeavours to awaken our imaginative mental faculties and draw our intellectual consciousness to the state and nature of these issues in the society and how they function and still operate in our time. Taking race for instance, she sought to "provide an account of race and racial identity that will be useful in the quest for social justice" (2012, p. 264). Alluding to the observations of Alcoff (2000b), she noted that her effort is to a significant extent, part of the constructive projects to make a historical review of the operational state of these issues as well as look into the future in reference to how these issues should operate among us for a better future (Haslanger 2012, p. 264). Presenting further her goals and aims on this project, Haslanger remarked that her effort: "is part of the larger project, the goal of which is to offer accounts of gender and race informed by a feminist epistemology...[by sketching] some of the central ideas of those accounts" (Haslanger 2000, p. 32). Haslanger never arrogated to herself the status of having put together an account that would serve as the sole and final possible account of these topics but in her intellectual humility remarked: "Let me emphasize at the beginning that I do not want to argue that my proposals provide the only acceptable ways to define race and gender; in fact, the epistemological framework I employ is explicitly designed to allow for different definitions responding to different concerns" (*ibid*). Making reference to Guess (1981) she emphasized that: "More specifically, the goal of the project is to consider what work the concepts of gender and race might do for us in a critical–specifically feminist and antiracist–social theory, and to suggest concepts that can accomplish at least important elements of that work" (*loc. cit.*, pp. 35-36). Through these essays, she has contributed her quota towards the project of eliminating hierarchical and discriminatory implications and undertones embedded in gender, race and colour.

3. HASLANGER ON GENDER AND RACE: METHODOLOGY

In her philosophical inquiry on gender and race, Sally Haslanger pursues an "analytical project", which she couches as a critical – hence normatively oriented – inquiry into the gender and race categories (Haslanger 2000, p. 35). She is interested in "determining whether our gender and race vocabularies in fact track social kinds that are typically obscured by the manifest content of our everyday race and gender concepts" (*loc. cit.*, p. 34). This means that, even though her work points to existing social kinds, she is not out "to defend the claim that these social kinds are what our race and gender talk is 'really' about" (*ibid.*) for, if she is right, our gender and race talk is about categories that are much more normatively objectionable – as they are based on oppressive social hierarchies.

In her style of approach, Haslanger treated the phenomena of gender and race in parallel. Her reason is simply that, they offer interchangeable accounts for the inquiry on each other, and they enrich one another, given their similarity of interest and the nature of the challenges the victims of gender- and race-based discrimination face as members of a "marked group" – a group subordinated and oppressed. This implies that the lessons derivable from each theory could cautiously be extrapolated in the other concept.

Haslanger recommends that one of the ways we could begin the inquiry on gender and race could be to replace the terms **"**gender**"** and **"**race**"** with a variable X. Then instead of asking: "What is gender?" "What is race?" We could ask: "What is X?" or "What is it to be an X?" For her, such framing could help us better track critical questions in reference to the concept, its natural kind, the point of having the concept; or even what concept could serve us better**.**

These diverse questions call attention to three different approaches of inquiry that have three different priorities: conceptual, descriptive and analytic inquiries (Haslanger 2000). With regard to the analytic project, Haslanger characterizes it as the task of "considering more fully the pragmatics of our talk employing the terms in question. What is the point of having these concepts? What cognitive or practical task do they (or should they) enable us to accomplish? Are they effective tools to accomplish our (legitimate) purposes; if not, what concepts would serve these purposes better?" (Haslanger 2000, p. 32-33). In other words, the analytic method consists in a critical examination of certain terms or categories, which not only aims at identifying what the point is, of

having these representational tools – which would be a *descriptive* task –, but also aims at evaluating whether they serve their function well enough, or whether any other representational tools could serve that function better – which would be a *normative* task.

The analytic method is contrasted with the descriptive method and the method of conceptual inquiry. In reference to the descriptive approach, Haslanger says its task is "to develop potentially more accurate concepts through careful consideration of the phenomena, usually relying on empirical or quasi-empirical methods" (*ibid*). Then in her explanation for the method of conceptual inquiry, she quotes Riley (1988) saying: "A conceptual inquiry into race or gender would seek an articulation of our concepts of race or gender" (*ibid*).

So far, I have attended to the topics that serve as lead to the subject of Haslanger's social constructionism. In doing this, I presented an introductory remark on her theory of social constructionism and examined the goals and objectives of her social construction account of gender and race, as well as her methodology therein. I will now examine her theoretical engagement on these topics of 'gender' and 'race' in the circle of social constructionism. In this perspective, I will foremost present her account of the social construction of 'gender', which would lead me to consider also her thoughts on female oppression. In treating her account of female oppression, I will pay particular attention to her definitional framework of this topic as well as her analytic account of it. Thereafter, I will switch over to her consideration of the subject of social construction of 'race'. This engagement x-rays the peculiarities of these topics. Furthermore, the problem that Haslanger identifies as the commonality and normativity challenge would offer a glance of the challenges usually associated with any theory in support of a unified account for "gender" and "race". At this moment, I will begin with her social construction account of 'gender'.

4. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

The term "gender" poses a challenge on its definition due to the diverse understandings surrounding it. In every forum that the topic gender features, on account of the understanding arising from its lived experiences, it elicits great interest, and diverse definitions would be made available. The precise problem at hand is that 'gender' is a contentious term. The contentious nature of the meaning of 'gender' is acknowledged not only among scholars in general but also among feminist

theorists. Buttressing this submission, Haslanger notes that "a quick survey of the literature reveals that a range of things have counted as "gender" within the feminist theorizing" (2012, p. 227).

In an attempt to give a definitional framework, Haslanger remarks that feminist theorists in their slogan highlight that "gender is the social meaning of sex" (Haslanger 2012, p. 248). In her analysis of this slogan, she envisages four different interpretations, understanding and usages of this term within the school of thought of the feminist theorists thus:

> i) The subjective experience of sexed embodiment or a broad psychological orientation to the world;
> ii) A set of attributes or ideals that function as norms for males and females ("masculinity" and "femininity");
> iii) A system of sexual symbolism;
> iv) The traditional social roles of men and women (Haslanger 2000, p. 37).

As a strategy that would guide her philosophical inquiry for a fruitful outcome, Haslanger opted to use focal analysis as an approach to define gender in its primary sense as a social class. In her take, "focal analysis undertakes to explain a variety of connected phenomena in terms of their relations to one that is theorized as the central or core phenomenon" (*ibid*). Then articulating the primary phenomenon to be attended to**,** she remarked that**,** "The core phenomenon to be addressed is the pattern of social relations that constitute the social classes of men as dominant and women as subordinate; norms, symbols, and identities are gendered in relation to the social relations that constitute gender" (*ibid*).

The concern of this central phenomenon comes under the focus of the materialist feminist project in relation to gender, which is "to define gender in terms of women's subordinate position in systems of male dominance…[and thereby] show how gender oppression is jointly sustained by both cultural and material forces" (*loc. cit.*, p. 38). The influence of cultural and material forces in entrenching female oppression is very significant if the concept of gender is to be properly laid bare. However, these two forces exercise their influences differently in different settings: in a particular culture, the issue of female oppression could manifest itself in a different way and have material factors play a different role in relation to another cultural setup. Similarly, overtime in some cultural environments, material variables could alter in some degrees the embodiment of

subordination of women. The fundamental fact is that the influences of cultural and material forces are dynamic in entrenching the oppression of women. So understanding the practice, mode of operation and presentation of gender in different settings is key towards understanding the metaphysical discussion on the concept of gender per se. In this periscope, Haslanger notes that the material strategy proffers three fundamental guiding principles in the account of gender:

> i) Gender categories are defined in terms of how one is socially positioned, where this is a function of, e.g., how one is viewed, how one is treated, and how one's life is structured socially, legally, and economically; gender is not defined in terms of an individual's intrinsic physical or psychological features.
>
> ii) Gender categories are defined hierarchically within a broader complex of oppressive relations; one group (viz., women) is socially positioned as subordinate to the other (viz., men), typically within the context of other forms of economic and social oppression.
>
> iii) Sexual difference functions as the physical marker to distinguish the two groups, and is used in the justification of viewing and treating the members of each group differently (*ibid.*).

Elucidating the submission above, Haslanger advances the following proposal as the socially constructed nature of gender:

> (Tentatively) we can capture these main points in the following analyses:
>
> i) S is a woman iff S is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction.
>
> ii) S is a man iff S is systematically privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction (*loc. cit.*, p. 39).

The obvious take away from the theoretical consideration of gender so far by Haslanger is that to be a woman is to be systematically subordinated on account of one's bodily features, which are associated with a certain reproductive role. *Vice versa*, to be a man is to be systematically privileged

on account of one's bodily features, which are also associated with another reproductive role. To pay sufficient attention to the issue of gender here, I will in the next sub-session articulate the theory of Haslanger on female oppression.

4.1. FEMALE OPPRESSION: CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

To situate well my discussion here, I will foremost define and clarify what the term oppression means and thereafter link it to women as victims of oppression in the society. In this way, I suppose that the issue at hand here would be clearer.

The term "oppression", like most issues that invoke high concerns in the society at large, or like issues that are considered as hindering social egalitarian co-existence, is quite contentious; and like most contentious themes, it is difficult to map out its neat definition without objections.

In the presence of the foregoing, Haslanger recommends that we could start with fundamental questions like, "What is oppression? [In her clarification,] The notion of oppression has been used to point to the ways in which groups of individuals are systematically and unfairly disadvantaged within a particular social structure" (Haslanger 2012, p. 312).

To make more explicit her account of oppression, Haslanger offered in concise manner the account of Marilyn Frye (1983) and Iris Young (1990) on oppression thus: "Oppression in the intended sense is a structural phenomenon that positions certain groups as disadvantaged and others as advantaged or privileged in relation to them" (Haslanger 2000, p. 39). Further, she quoted Frye (1983, 11) who characterizes oppression as being made up of "an enclosing structure of forces and barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people" (Haslanger 2000, p. 39).

Articulating further a definition of oppression, she quoted Young (1990) thus, "oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short, the normal processes of everyday life" (*loc. cit.*, p. 40).

In her analysis and additional clarification, Haslanger quoted Frye (1983) to substantiate that women are oppressed on account of their nature as females in relation to males. She writes:

> One is marked for application of oppressive pressures by one's membership in some group or category...In the case at hand, it is the category, woman....If a woman has little or no economic or political power, or achieves little of what she wants to achieve, a major causal factor in this is that she is a woman. For any woman of any race or economic class, being a woman is significantly attached to whatever disadvantages and deprivations she suffers, be they great or small.... [In contrast,] being male is something one has going for him, even if race or class or age or disability is going against him (*ibid*.).

In her additional contribution in defining the concept of oppression and consequently analyzing the reality involved, Haslanger notes, "The most familiar notion of oppression is one that implies an agent or agents misusing their power to harm another"(Haslanger 2012, p. 312).

There is no other better way to articulate the oppression of women other than isolating and presenting the accounts of its operation. Advancing this project in this perspective, Haslanger comes up with a critical and fundamental question in clarification of the issues of oppression of women. She asks: "What does it mean to say that someone is "systematically subordinated" or "privileged", and further, that the subordination occurs "on the basis of" certain features? The background idea is that women are oppressed, and that they are oppressed as women. But we still need to ask: What does it mean to say that women are oppressed, and what does the qualification "as women" add?" (Haslanger 2000, p. 39).

What the qualification "as women" adds to contextualize the phenomenon of oppression is my primary point of interest at this particular point in time. This is because this qualification situates and contextualizes the reality of this challenge, (viz. the operation of women). On its own, I recognize that oppression takes place in the society. In this line of thought, women are oppressed because of their female nature, (viz. on account of their female reproductive role). In this context, I must also observe that being male is not an all-round glorious situation because, in some contexts, depending on the nature of the oppression invoked in that place, being female could be something that a woman has going for her. This becomes obvious when we analyze the incident of racial

profiling in United States, like the instances of operation stop–and–frisk policy. In such instances, being a Black male even singles one out for oppressive and dehumanizing experiences and being a woman of colour gets you scot free automatically (*loc. cit*., p. 41).

That said, in analysis and clarification of the diverse forms that oppression of females plays out in the society, I must say that it has actually and systematically found its presence in every significant sector of the society: in the legal system, health and educational policies, the political and military sectors, in the economic arena, etc. One thing is clear, it hurts the self-esteem of the oppressed person, creates a scene of socially endorsed indignity of the victim and deprivation of the candidate in question.

Oppression of women has in time come in many ways. Sometimes it is institutionalized, and in some other ways, it is simply practiced by the society as a normal way of life. Haslanger in a bid to group the diverse forms it manifests highlighted the five forms of oppression developed by Young (1990) thus: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and (systematic) violence (*loc. cit*., p. 40).

Another significant point worthy of note is that oppression of women hits individual victims in different degrees depending on the social position that one occupies. Haslanger while elucidating this point, submits that "a wealthy woman who can afford to take a taxi whenever she is anxious about her security on the street is not oppressed by the prevalence of violence against women to the same extent as a poor woman who must use public transportation and walk several blocks home from the bus stop after her shift is over at the midnight" (2012, p. 326). The oppression of the "marked group" could sometimes hit a particular set of people in double fashion. In such instances, it could be very overwhelming when for instance as a female who's also racialized, she suffers on account of being a woman and further on account of being a member of a racialized group. In this situation, this woman would experience discrimination in two ways, which is a scenario of double tragedy.

However, some set of social violent activities tend to target women in greater proportion than men. Haslanger buttresses this claim here with a striking expatiation: "that women are at greater risk of rape, domestic violence, and sexual harassment than men is an injustice that affects all women,

whether or not they are ever the direct victim of such acts, and whether or not they are typically in position, by virtue of their wealth or their location, to protect themselves" (Haslanger 2012, pp. 326-327). In such instances as above, it is plausible to say that women are oppressed as women.

In whichever form that oppression of the females presents itself, one thing that cannot be waved away is that it bastardizes the civilization of humanity. The more perplexing predicament with regard to the oppression of women is that this social ill is still among us in diverse shades and colours, and in different cultures and sectors of human operation. This underlines why there is every need for everyone to get onboard to address this social monster.

5. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RACE

The concept "race" per se attracts multiple and diverse understandings. On account of these diverse meanings it connotes, it invokes strong emotions whenever it is used. This phenomenon plays out whether at the academic arena or at a colloquial setting. Furthermore, it is informative to note that the meaning and reality[3] of race has been politicized and efforts to rescue this situation have been confronted by challenges arising from diverse perceptions of what race is and the avalanche of interests by different groups. Haslanger brought out these observations succinctly thus: "The question of what the term 'race' means and whether race is real have become tied up with political goals and strategies for achieving them" (2012, p. 299). As a matter of fact in metaphysical discussions, some schools of thought even cast doubt on the reality of race per se, while some others accept in parts the understanding of the term. Haslanger explained the conceptual understanding of these different schools on the idea of race. In reference to race naturalists, she remarks that they accept some accounts of race while race eliminativists describe discussion on race as figments of the mind. Haslanger quotes Appiah (1996) and Zack (2002) in her effort to throw more light on the theory of eliminativists, and she writes: "Race eliminativists maintain that talk of races is no better than the talk of witches or ghosts, and in order to achieve racial justice we should stop participating in a fiction that underwrites racism" (2012, p. 299). Then capturing the position of race constructionists, she cited Omi and Winant (1994) and Mills (1997) and notes that they "argue that races are real, but that they are social rather than natural groups; on the

[3] Sally Haslanger notes that arguing along the line that race is real is less problematic than couching the discussion on whether it exists. For her some equate the talk of race to talks on unicorns etc., as an imaginary object and not as a social category (2012, p. 299).

constructionist view, racial justice requires us to recognize the mechanisms of racial formation so that we can undo their damage**"** (2012, p. 299). In a similar vein, she made reference to some authors like Kitcher (1999), Andreason (2000) and claimed that the "Present-day race naturalists agree with the eliminativists and constructionists that races are not what they were once thought to be–they are not groups with a common racial essence that explains a broad range of psychological and moral features of the group's members–but they disagree with both other views in maintaining that the human species can be divided on the basis of natural (biological, genetic, physical) features into a small set of groups that correspond to the ordinary racial divisions" (2012, p. 299).

Haslanger also calls attention to connotative references to the term race, which in her clarification is very much alive at least in the contemporary United States. These connotative references come in such coinages as: "racial hatred and racial contempt (whether overt or covert), explicit discrimination, subtle exclusion, unintentional evasion, cultural bias in favor of Eurocentric norms of behaviour and beauty, negative racial stereotypes portrayed in the media, arts, and public discourse and so on" (Haslanger 2000, p. 311). Haslanger remarks that these insights are also contributive towards the understanding of the theoretical discussion on race per se and racial oppression (*ibid*).

Haslanger in defining race in its most simple form drew inspiration from the conceptual definition of gender by feminists, and held that race is basically the "social meaning of colour" (2000, p. 43). To help us appreciate this input Haslanger highlights that we should simply "consider how members of the group are socially positioned and what physical markers serve as supposed basis for such treatment" (2012, p. 251).

Elaborating her definition of the concept "race", she remarks:

> A group is racialized (in context C) iff its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in C), and the group is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (2000, p. 43; 2012, p. 251).

This input was her compressed working definition of race. In her extended account, she defined race thus:

> A group G is racialized relative to context C iff members of G are (all and only) those:
>
> i) who are observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed in C to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (or regions);
>
> ii) whose having (or being imagined to have) these features marks them within the context of the background ideology in C as appropriately occupying certain kinds of social position that are in fact either subordinate or privileged (and so motivates and justifies their occupying such a position); and
>
> iii) whose satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in their systematic subordination or privilege in C, i.e., who are along some dimension systematically subordinated or privileged when in C, and satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in that dimension of privilege or subordination (Haslanger 2000, p. 44).

To clarify some denotations and connotations that this extended definition convey, she writes:

> In other words, races are those groups demarcated by the geographical associations accompanying perceived body type, when those associations take on evaluative significance concerning how members of the group should be viewed and treated…. Given this definition, we can say that S is of the White (Black, Asian...) race (in C) iff Whites (Blacks, Asians...) are a racialized group (in C), and S is a member. On this view, whether a group is racialized, and so how and whether an individual is raced, is not an absolute fact, but will depend on context. For example, Blacks, Whites, Asians, Native Americans, are currently racialized in the US insofar as these are all groups defined in terms of physical features associated with places of origin, and insofar as membership in the group functions socially as a basis for evaluation (Haslanger 2000, pp. 44-45).

Haslanger framed some critical questions which could guide our thoughts and reflections to realize the gravity and the subtlety of racial operation. Her questions run thus:

> i) Is there currently a single or dominant public meaning (or folk concept) of 'race'? If so, what is it (or what are the contenders)?

ii) In the quest for social justice, for example, in debating health policy, do we need the concept of race? For what purpose? If so, can we make do with the folk concept or should we modify the concept?

iii) If the folk concept of race is not an adequate tool to help achieve social justice (if, perhaps, it is even a barrier), then how should we proceed? (Haslanger 2012, pp. 44-45).

In furtherance of the discussion on the reality of race[4] and how it operates in the everyday life I will allude to the American environment, where the issue of race has been a very contentious issue since after the historic abolition of slave trade [25.05.1807]. In this perspective, Haslanger writes, "The self-evidence of racial distinctions in everyday American life is at striking odds with the uncertainty about the category of race in law and the academy" (Haslanger 2000, p. 32). Obviously, race is real as our discussion so far has been able to establish and evidence. Giving this understanding, I will now commit the next sub-session to discuss how the goal of feminist-antiracist theorists could be achieved.

5.1. PATH TO RACIAL JUSTICE

Giving the foregoing we could ask: "What concept of race should we employ in order to achieve the anti-racist goals we share?" (2012, p. 298). In a similar manner, we could soberly ask ourselves: "Whether there is something about race that should also constrain us? Is there something significant we are in danger of losing track of should we pursue the elimination of race? It would seem that racial equality should be our goal (as opposed to the elimination of race), only if we have reason to view "colour" as a justifiable way for societies to differentiate groups of people, that is, if "color" is a legitimate basis for a thin social position" (2012, pp. 255-256).

Haslanger recommends that, "the effort to end racism must recognize racialized groups in order to understand the processes by which they are formed and sustained, and in order to remedy the ongoing injustice done to their members. Recognizing racialized groups is not only compatible with justice but essential to achieving it" (2012, p. 256). She is here advocating that the historical cases of racism should not be swept under the carpet but should be attended to and addressed. In

[4] I would like to take the liberty to interchangeably use the terms race, racial distinctions or racial discrimination in this project.

so doing, healing would be accomplished and restitution set in motion. She drives home her points in this line of thought thus, "it may be appropriate for societies to be structured so that there are social implications of having suffered injustice–implications that attempt to redress the injustice or prevent recurring injustice" (2012, p. 257).

Pursuing this project of addressing historical racism and putting up measures to checkmate its re-occurrence in the future is a significant way to expose and handle some correlations that have historically been accepted as elements of truth and lay bare how unfounded these discriminatory thoughts and concepts are in themselves. For example, "there are significant generalizations linking race/"color" with disease in the United States, the basis of these generalizations is social and not biological" (2012, p. 256). To make this point more vivid, she quotes Root (2000, S629) where Root addressed the unfounded correlations of diseases and sickness with blacks:

> Blacks are seven times more likely to die of tuberculosis than whites, three times more likely to die of H.I.V.-A.I.D.S. and twice as likely to die of diabetes. The diseases are biological but the racial differences are not; How is this possible? … No mystery. Race affects income, housing, and healthcare, and these, in turn, affect health. Stress suppresses the immune system and being black in the U.S. today is stressful (Haslanger 2012, p. 256).

Our discussion so far has been able to present and underpin the reality of "gender" and "race". I will now proceed to discuss challenges usually associated with any theory in support of a unified account for "gender" and "race".

6. THE COMMONALITY AND NORMATIVITY PROBLEM

As we have seen, Haslanger advocates a conception of gender and race whereby these are the result of various social relations and social structures. However, is her proposal accurate? Is it accurate to say that women share, as a category, subordination on account of their physical traits? Isn't there anything else that they share as women? This is the so-called "commonality problem". Furthermore, is her proposal fair? Does it unfairly exclude some females from the characterization? This is the so-called "normativity problem".

That said, Haslanger however remarked that within the school of feminist theorists, these two challenges: normativity and commonality problems, are associated with any theory in support of a unified account for women and by extension for the racialized group. In the understanding of these feminist theorists, it is not just that it is difficult to find a unifying account for women for instance, but that there is no *fundamentum in re* to establish that a unifying account for women exists (2000, p. 37). I will now articulate in turns the peculiar issues associated with these two challenges.

6.1. COMMONALITY PROBLEM

In clarification of this problem, Haslanger note**s** that the commonality challenge queries if there are fundamental traits that females or the racialized folks share in common. Elucidating further the issues encountered in the commonality challenge, Haslanger quotes Spelman (1988) thus: "The commonality problem questions whether there is anything social that females have in common that could count as their "gender". If we consider all females—females of different times, places, and cultures—there are reasons to doubt that there is anything beyond body type (if even that) that they all share" (Haslanger 2012, p. 250).

Pondering further on this question, Haslanger inquires: "Whether there is anything social that all females can plausibly be said to have in common…. Whether females share any intrinsic (non-anatomical) features such as psychological makeup, character traits, beliefs, values, experiences or, alternatively, whether there is a particular social role that all females have occupied across culture and history, the answer seems to be "no"" (Haslanger 2000, p. 45).

Articulating her thoughts still on the normativity challenge in reference to race, Haslanger observes that: First, there are no racial genes responsible for the complex morphologies and cultural patterns we associate with different races. Secondly, in different contexts racial distinctions are drawn on the basis of different characteristics (*loc. cit.*, p. 43).

Going further in her explanation, she reiterates that "our everyday racial classifications do not track meaningful biological categories: there are no "racial genes" responsible for the different clusters of physical or cultural differences between members of racial groups, and divisions between "racial" groups are a product of social forces that vary across history and culture" (2000, p. 274).

In explanation and analysis of these theories, Haslanger observes that rather what women generally have in common is their subordination (oppression) in relation to men on account of their sex (Haslanger 2000). This subordination has been there in every culture in history, and presently still persists in some cultures. However, its rate and nature could be the apparent difference. She quickly adds that this claim however, "provides a schematic account that highlights the interdependence between the material forces that subordinate women, and the ideological frameworks that sustain them" (Haslanger 2000, p. 45).

It is not out of place that some theorists would counter this argument by pointing out that this position overgeneralizes, given that historical records abound of some women who are (or were) not oppressed. In fact, some theorists could up the ante by arguing that, there are even some women who historically could be said to have been on a par with men in the exercise of power and influence and as such were not subordinated[5]. Haslanger notes that such cases could pass for simple exceptions that do not make the rule (viz. an instance of counterexample). Clarifying the focus of her theoretical submission here, she points out that: "The analysis is intended to capture a meaningful political category for critical feminist efforts, and non-oppressed females do not fall within that category (though they may be interesting for other reasons)" (Haslanger 2000, p. 46). In assumption that my points above are clear enough, I will now handle the normativity problem.

6.2. NORMATIVITY CHALLENGE

On the side of the normativity challenge, Sally Haslanger quotes Butler (1990, Ch. 1) as follows: "The normativity problem raises the concern that any definition of "what woman is" is value-laden, and will marginalize certain females, privilege others, and reinforce current gender norms" (2012, p. 40). Buttressing further this claim, Haslanger remarks that, "any effort to define women will problematically privilege some women and (theoretically) marginalize others, and will itself become normative" (Haslanger 2000, p. 46). This submission here highlights the absence of a common denominator or unified account for women. This constitutes then a source of worry when we reflect on the gender challenge. The basis of the worry has been explained further by Haslanger as follows: "One worry is that bias inevitably occurs in deciding which experiences or social roles

[5] In this instance candidates as follows could easily come to mind: politically in the ancient times Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba; in our present time Queen Elisabeth II, Angela Merkel, chancellor of Germany, Hillary Clinton, even media idols like Oprah Winfrey and so on and so forth.

are definitive; a second worry is that if someone wants to be a "real" woman, she should conform to the definition of women provided, and this will reinforce rather than challenge male dominance" (*ibid*.).

Just like the exceptional instances in the case of commonality, so in this case of normativity, some members of the female population may not fit squarely into the account presented on women, but, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that the presence of oppression should be a definitive factor to count in this theoretical exercise as a critical feminist inquiry (Haslanger 2000). In this body of work, it is pertinent to keep in sight the object of this account, so that issues involved here would not be muddled up or become confusing. In this perspective, Haslanger reiterates that her "definition is more likely to offer a negative ideal that challenges male dominance" (Haslanger 2000, p. 46).

7. HASLANGER'S GENDER AND RACE THEORY: RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the striking points one could take home from this critical analytic inquiry by Sally Haslanger on the project on gender and race is that the phenomenon of racial and gender (sexual) oppression is real. Given that it is real and that it is a social category, she asks: What do we want them to be? As a way of addressing the challenge associated with gender and race, she asks further: "Is it useful to think of these groups in these terms: Does it serve both the goal of understanding racial and sexual oppression, and of achieving sexual and racial equality to think of ourselves as men or women, or raced in the ways proposed?" (Haslanger 2000, p. 47). In response to her many questions, she advocates foremost for change in terminology. She is emphatic in her rejection of the term, "race", even though she didn't commit to any alternative terminology but her submission is unambiguous. In her words: "Race, as I've proposed we understand it, is something to be rid of" (Haslanger 2012, p. 269). She adds that in the build up for a just society, the use of the categories "male" and "female" besides other possible terminologies (like "herms, merms, ferms" etc.) to mark sexual differences should be adopted to have egalitarian implications only (*ibid*.).

Her appeal and argument in advocating for terminology change is very informative: "By appropriating the everyday terminology of race and gender, the analyses I've offered invite us to acknowledge the force of oppressive systems in framing our personal and political identities…. Gender and racial inequality are not simply a matter of public policy but implicate each of us at the

heart of our self-understandings, the terminological shift calls us to reconsider who we think we are" (Haslanger 2000, p. 47).

Still in her advocacy for adjustment or change of terminologies, she draws attention to a fundamental reality surrounding use of terminologies especially in addressing a group. Her position is that terms for social groups perform not only descriptive functions (which in its own, is neutral) but they serve also rhetorical purposes, for instance: "It invokes a set of "appropriate" (contextually specific) norms and expectations. It positions her [women] in a social framework and makes available certain kinds of evaluation; in short, it carries prescriptive force…. [A]ccepting or identifying with the classification typically involves an endorsement of some norms and expectations" (*ibid*).

The appeal Haslanger makes is very clear and straight. Everyone who consents to the imperative of her submission is called upon to lead in action to end racial and female oppression, not only through her recommendations above but also by "work[ing] to undermine those forces that make being a man, a woman, or a member of a racialized group possible; we should refuse to be gendered man or woman, refuse to be raced" (Haslanger 2000, p. 48). In furtherance of her line of understanding, she observes "that it is important to distinguish existing races and genders because of historical and contemporary forms of oppression;…we should distinguish between new forms of gender in order to accommodate the special burdens some humans carry in the process of reproduction;…we should distinguish groups with respect to medical conditions in order to provide adequate care and support" (Haslanger 2000, p. 258). These for Haslanger are some of the practical paths the society could toll to counter oppression of the "marked group" and undermine the forces sustaining the practice of it.

Haslanger never lost sight of the fact that no existential problem has only one solution. To this effect, she argues that her submission "in one sense…is "just semantics": I'm asking us to use an old term in a new way. But it is also politics: I'm asking us to understand ourselves and those around us as deeply molded by injustice and to draw the appropriate prescriptive inference" (Haslanger 2000, p. 48).

At the end of the day, Haslanger did not offer new terminology to be used because her primary concern was not to prescribe new terminology [or terminologies as the case could be] or embark upon legislation of what terms to use but to call on everyone to reflect upon what type of terms we apply as well as the implications of such applications in reference to the racialized and gendered groups.

Still on terminological shift, I find it very indicative that she avoided falling into the intellectual trap of prescriptive theoretical engagement. She could have arrogated to herself the status of the gatekeeper of the society, who should dish out directives for the tools of social engagement and operation. In her intellectual dexterity and humility, she steered clear of such a pitfall, and even among the terminologies she offers for consideration, she refuses committing to any of them. She has this to her credit.

Essentially, the project of Haslanger on gender and race is a work on social justice. Her theories have shown how imbalanced the strata of social relations among human agents have been on account of either gender [sex kind] or race [social kinds based on origin/birth] both in history and still today in some cultures. The subordination of women and the racialized groups is in principle and in every ramification oppressive, exploitative and dehumanizing. The ordering of the society on egalitarian principles should not be a topic of choice but an issue of social procedure entrenched in the system: in the legal system, politics and policies of government, organizations and agencies, in philosophy, religion and all sectors of human engagement. It ought already to be an imperative to order the structures of social relationships according to the principles of egalitarianism. In this perspective, the theoretical inquiry of Haslanger on gender and race is a very resourceful contribution in advancement of these ideals and principles, and in entrenching social justice. Those who strive to structure the society to bequeath privileges on some human agents and subordinate the other should be considered as agents who are resisting the reality that social justice is already a given and all should rather strive to promote and entrench it just as Haslanger has contributed her quota here.

8. GENDER AND RACE PROJECT: APPRAISAL

Sally Haslanger's social construction of gender and race presents an account of the social relations among human agents as it affects the oppression of women and racialized groups. However, some

of her submissions are objectionable. A potential criticism of her account is: why would one construe gender and race as *hierarchical* categories? A non-hierarchical definition would have offered the following benefits: "first, [it could] provide a place in our model for cultural representations of the body *besides* those that contribute to maintaining subordination and privilege, we could better acknowledge that there are positive aspects to having a gender and race. And second, the accounts would provide a framework for envisioning the sorts of constructive changes needed to create a more just world" (Haslanger 2000, p. 49).

In response, Haslanger insists that gender and race have intrinsic hierarchical implications. Her position is that gender and race are not just social positions motivated and justified by cultural responses to the body, but rather social constructs framed (or better put, inbuilt with hierarchy) to subordinate females in relation to their male counterparts, as well as to discriminate the racialized groups to confer privileges on their non-racialized counterparts (Haslanger 2012, p. 252).

Furthermore, Haslanger reiterates that one should not lose sight of the fact that she is advocating for a radical rethinking of sex and gender and that, by implication, one should pay attention to her advocacy, which primarily is: "We should refuse to use anatomy as a primary basis for classifying individuals and that any distinctions between kinds of sexual and reproductive bodies are importantly political and open to contest" (Haslanger 2000, p. 49).

Going further on her clarification, she refers to Frye (1996) and Gatens (1996), and states that she would not get into the discussion suggesting her to define gender and race on the basis of sexual and reproductive differences which would avoid hierarchical definitions. She admonishes rather that we employ the definition of gender in generic sense, which captures the standard slogan: gender is the social meaning of sex, and employs the terms man and woman. This option does not create the controversial sense of hierarchical structure (Haslanger 2000, p. 50). In this line of thought, there would be non-hierarchical definition of gender thus:

> A group G is a gender relative to context C iff members of G are (all and only) those:
> i) who are regularly observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed in C to be evidence of their reproductive capacities;

> ii) whose having (or being imagined to have) these features marks them within the context of the ideology in C as motivating and justifying some aspect(s) of their social position; and
> iii) whose satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in C in their social position's having one or another of these designated aspects (Haslanger 2000, p. 50).

On the side of race, she responds to a similar call for a non-hierarchical definition of the concept of 'race' and avers that in the quest for a just society we could adopt a framework as follows:

> let races be, as previously defined, those hierarchically organized groups that are defined (roughly) by physical features and (assumed) geographical origins, and call those that aren't hierarchically organized (in the context in question) "ethnicities". Admittedly, ethnicity as we know it does have implications for social status and power (Haslanger 2000, pp. 50-51).

So far, I have captured the fundamental theory of Sally Haslanger on the social phenomena of gender and race, what remains now is to conclude my thoughts on her philosophical postulations. In this work, I tried to examine and present her theory on gender and race. One of the significant notes that Haslanger makes available is that these phenomena, gender and race, are social constructs. Secondly, she makes it clear that these concepts have historically and in some places until this present moment been utilized as tools of subordination of women and the racialized groups. I developed the term "oppressed group" to capture the members of these two groups: women as subordinated gender and the racialized groups. Because I identify and agree with her theory, I joined my voice with hers to call attention to these twin social ills by unearthing the diverse ways they operate in the society, just to create grounded awareness; and by articulating some of the ways that their ills could be mitigated.

9. HASLANGER'S GENDER AND RACE PROJECT: CONCLUSION

In line with her theoretical objective in this inquiry to make contributions that could be resourceful for critical social agents for the vision of a just society, Sally Haslanger has been able to unearth that the phenomena of "gender and race are real; and that both are social categories. [Secondly, that] race and gender (as we know it) are hierarchical, but the systems that sustain the hierarchy

are contingent. And although the ideologies of race and gender and the hierarchical structures they sustain are substantively very different, they are intertwined. Thirdly, [in her theoretical account] there is room for theoretical categories such as man, woman, and race (and particular racial groups), that take hierarchy to be a constitutive element, and those such as gender and ethnicity that do not…. [Haslanger is] willing to grant that there are other ways to define race or gender, man or woman, that are useful to answer different questions, motivated by different concerns and priorities" (Haslanger 2000, p. 52).

At this juncture, I must point out that her critical choice not to be prescriptive has saved social constructionists on gender and race the predicament of worrying whether other possible options not envisioned by Haslanger could still be effective in the pursuit of social justice in this mission. This implies that there still exists an open window to explore other measures to engage the project of social justice in relation to gender and race. Furthermore, in reference to her advocacy for a terminological shift, my worry is, would this scenario not bring confusion in dialogue in the mind of users, giving that some discussants would still be exposed to the old terminology and some others would already be using the new version? In the light of these few remarks, I will go forward to discuss in chapter three the theory of conceptual engineering in general. The theory would invariably offer some insights into the project I have at hand (viz. the subject of gender and race as social challenges).

CHAPTER THREE – CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING IN GENERAL

1. INTRODUCTION

The theory of "Conceptual Engineering" is a novel domain in philosophy. As a nascent field of philosophical inquiry, it is still at its budding stage (Cappelen 2018, p. IX; Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, p. 2). However, conceptual engineering as a philosophical exercise is as old as philosophy itself, when we evaluate and appreciate revisionist projects in philosophy as a practice of conceptual engineering. In this line of thought then, its operation cuts across all segments of established branches of philosophy: metaphysics, logic, epistemology and so on (Cappelen 2018). The irreducible fact is that, "conceptual engineering is an important topic for philosophers" (Cappelen 2018, p. 10), and this is one of the driving forces for this research project.

To adequately address the theory, conceptual engineering in general, I will among other things discuss the controversy surrounding the terminology of this philosophical inquiry, on whether it should be designated as conceptual engineering or conceptual ethics. Thereafter, I will present a definitional framework and the nature of conceptual engineering. In furtherance of this task, I will x-ray the basis for this theory and its significance as well as the encountered constrains of this theory. In my estimation, I suppose that these identified areas would lay bare very well the theory of conceptual engineering as pursued here.

In reference to the contest for the term to be used in designation of the philosophical exercise captured within this frame, two terms come out prominent as advanced by two schools of thought: conceptual engineering and conceptual ethics. I will give attention to this in the next section.

2. CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING: NOMENCLATURAL CONTROVERSY

There is, so to say, a debate (or better put a controversy) on which term would be more appropriate to apply in designation of the philosophical projects that fall within the domain described as conceptual engineering. Some philosophers, like Simon Blackburn (1999) and, Herman Cappelen, favour the usage of the term "conceptual engineering", while other scholars, like David Plunkett and his co-authors, advocate the application of the term "conceptual ethics" (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, p. 2). Even though these two domains share many similarities, Kevin Scharp avers that they are simply distinct (Scharp 2020, p. 405). At this juncture, I will examine some of the accounts that

Cappelen advances as top-down characterization of these theories (conceptual engineering and conceptual ethics).

On these theories, no doubt, one could identify some differences even though similarities among them also abound, which give rise to this controversy on nomenclature. Those who champion the application of conceptual engineering, maintain that it "is concerned with the assessment and improvement of concepts" (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, p. 3). In a broad account of the scope of conceptual engineering, Cappelen notes that it concerns: "(i) The assessment of representational devices, (ii) reflections on and proposal for how to improve representational devices, and (iii) efforts to implement the proposed improvements" (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, p. 3). The key central issues on conceptual engineering as accounted by Cappelen are thus:

> (a.) What are the relevant representational devices? Possible answers include: concepts (as they are construed in some part of psychology or philosophy), lexical items, and the semantic values of lexical items. A closely connected cluster of questions concerns whether they are in language or thought, or both. Different conceptual engineers will give different answers and that will have enormous implications for how the field is understood and practiced.
>
> (b.) Given an answer to the first cluster of questions, we can ask: What kinds of defects can representational devices have? Throughout the history of philosophy, a variety of defects have been proposed: cognitive defects (that undermine our ability to reason properly), moral or political defects (that undermine moral or political values of various sorts), theoretical defects (that undermine progress within some theoretical field), or semantic defects (where the semantic value is incoherent, incomplete, or missing).
>
> (c.) Once you have detected a defect in a representational device you care about, it's natural to think about how to improve it. What are the ameliorative strategies? There are four basic options once you've identified a defect in C: (i) Do nothing—just live with it (can't improve it, can't get rid of it), (ii) Abandonment of C (it's so defective it can't be improved), (iii) Improvement of C, (iv) Replacement of C (for certain purposes, in certain contexts).
>
> (d.) Once you have settled on an ameliorative strategy, you might want to do some work to implement it, that is, you might want to engage in a bit of activism on

> behalf of your ameliorative strategy. If that's something you want to do, it raises an 'implementation challenge': how are ameliorative strategies best implemented? (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, p. 3).

That said in reference to the designation "conceptual engineering; then on the other hand, the theory "conceptual ethics" in broad consideration "concerns a range of normative and evaluative issues about thought, talk, and representation" (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, p. 4). Plunkett explains further the concern of conceptual ethics to include:

> Issues about which concepts we should use, ways in which concepts can be defective, what we should mean by our words, and when we should refrain from using certain words…. Some of the core issues in conceptual ethics concern concepts…. These include, centrally, normative issues about which concepts one should use (and why) and evaluative issues about which concepts are better than others (and why) (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, p. 4).

In a related account, Burgess and Plunkett note that "conceptual ethics is the business of determining which concepts we ought to use, and one reason we think it's important is that our conceptual choices have profound, non-conceptual consequences" (Burgess & Plunkett 2013, p. 1102).

Scharp on his own account of *Conceptual ethics,* which is however not very far from the claims advanced by Plunkett, maintains that "*Conceptual ethics* is the study of evaluative and normative issues associated with our concepts and the words that express them" (Scharp 2020, p. 405).

In his further explanation, Scharp notes that:

> *Evaluative* issues are those pertaining to how good something is; for example, oxygen is a better concept than phlogiston, and the luminiferous ether is not a good concept. *Normative* issues are those pertaining to obligations and permissions—to what we ought to do and what we may do; for example, we ought to use the word 'woman' to express the concept of someone oppressed on the basis of stereotypical female characteristics, and we ought not use the concept of mass from Newtonian mechanics when calibrating the atomic clocks on GPS satellites (*ibid*).

Juxtaposing these two theories Scharp claims that:

> Conceptual ethics is clearly involved in conceptual engineering because the latter often relies on evaluative and normative judgments about our concepts. However, not all conceptual ethics is conceptual engineering. For example, judging that our concept of mental illness is just fine for our purposes is doing conceptual ethics, but it isn't doing conceptual engineering. And the converse holds as well. For example, establishing a relative consistency proof for an axiomatic theory of ascending truth and descending truth … is a part of conceptual engineering, but it isn't a part of conceptual ethics. Hence, I do not see the two terms as competitors for describing a single area of philosophy (*ibid*).

Among many points that stand out in the relationship between conceptual engineering and conceptual ethics, I would like to point out two of them. Both theories are concerned with concepts as devices of representation of ideas, thoughts and the world; secondly they are involved on the exercise to change conceptual or linguistic practices (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020, pp. 4-5).

The accounts above underline the fact that these two philosophical theories have a lot in common, or better put, they have intertwining projects: that is conceptual innovation. That notwithstanding, they have areas of diversity just as already highlighted, which in a word outstandingly circles around normativity. In fact, the challenge on the nomenclature to apply arises because of the symmetric areas of interest. However, their directional differences make it difficult to use these terms interchangeably.

I suppose that the challenge on this aspect of nomenclature shouldn't be treated as if it doesn't exist, if a commendable examination of the philosophical theory of conceptual engineering in general is to be carried out.

In reference to my philosophical inquiry, I am inclined to the nomenclatural choice of Cappelen with his term of conceptual engineering. This is because this area captures better the metaphysical inquiry on gender and race examined by Haslanger, which is the circle of my attention in this work. That said, I will now examine the definition of conceptual engineering.

3. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

It is plausible to note that an attempt to present a definition of conceptual engineering may not yield a very sharp result, given that the domain under consideration is still a budding theoretical field and not everything about this theory has been delineated. However, it is easier to offer a general view of conceptual engineering than to articulate its definitional frame. That notwithstanding, I will explore some accounts to help present a hindsight into the philosophical domain investigated here.

In my understanding, conceptual engineering is a philosophical theory in the business of assessing and improving the phenomenon, "concept", which is a veritable vehicle for representing our mental thoughts and linguistic exercises, for representing the world and reality. That said, by exploring the accounts of theorists in definition of conceptual engineering we have also the following:

Kevin Andrew Scharp notes: "I take conceptual engineering to be actively changing some aspect of our concepts—eliminating bad ones, deciding which ones we should use, and which word should express them" (Scharp 2020, pp. 396-397). Going further on his definition, Scharp avers that "the idea of conceptual engineering is really taking an active role with respect to our conceptual scheme and changing it when one finds defects in those concepts" (Scharp 2020, p. 397). Scharp in his reading of Wittgenstein claimed that "conceptual engineering can been seen as in the service of an overarching therapeutic program in the spirit of Wittgenstein [like in] Wittgenstein's methodology the goal of showing the fly the way out of the fly bottle (*ibid*). With these few lines and thought in the frame of definition, I can now examine the nature of this theory among other topics therein.

4. NATURE OF CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

Conceptual engineering investigates concept, which are the main vehicles of representation of our mental activities. They come out sometimes deficient in execution of some intended tasks. Defective concepts would yield defects in communication. Since this situation cannot be allowed to stand, conceptual engineering becomes not only necessary but also inevitable. In concise presentation, the project here circles around "assessing and developing improvements of our representational devices" (Cappelen 2020, p. 132).

Conceptual engineering as a theory has influence in several fields of philosophy: metaphysics, epistemology, moral and political philosophy and so on. Furthermore, the areas of its operation go beyond philosophy into other academic fields like law, engineering, physics, etc. But I will not delve into the applications of conceptual engineering outside the philosophical domain. Nevertheless, conceptual engineering carries out its project of assessing and ameliorating the concepts employed in these different fields to achieve clarity of thought and good representation of reality. In its exercise of analysis and amelioration, it would for instance: in political philosophy, assess and ameliorate political concepts, such as those of equality, justice or freedom; in epistemology, assess and ameliorate epistemic concepts, like "knowledge" or "justification"; in moral philosophy, assess and ameliorate moral concepts, like "good" or "ought"; in metaphysics, assess and ameliorate metaphysical concepts, like "existence", "essence" or "grounding"; also a semantic ameliorator will in the spirit of amelioration, assess and ameliorate semantic concepts such as those of reference or truth, and so on and so forth (Cappelen 2020, p. 132). In so doing, is the concept employed enabled to deliver the meaning intended in communication and representation of the ideas. Going by this perspective, we ought to replace defective concepts with concepts that could represent the idea and reality intended without giving any of the problems that plagued the old concept.

Articulating further the nature of conceptual engineering Scharp avers:

> The central idea of conceptual engineering is that we ought to take the same critical attitude toward our concepts. Likewise, if a concept doesn't fare well under critical scrutiny, the active attitude kicks in and one crafts new concepts to do [the] work [one] wants without giving rise to the problems inherent in the old ones….Conceptual engineering is doing to concepts what most of us already think we should be doing to our beliefs (Scharp 2020, pp. 398).

Scharp clarifies his claims that some ideas could be inconsistent by pointing out examples of such controversy thus: "The concepts that I think are inconsistent include truth, knowledge, nature, meaning, virtue, explanation, essence, causation, validity, rationality, freedom, necessity, person, beauty, belief, goodness, space, time, and justice. So when I say I think that philosophy is for the most part the study of inconsistent concepts, that's really what I mean. I think those are all inconsistent concepts; those are all defective concepts" (*loc. cit.*, p. 397).

Scharp in reference to his earlier work (2013) remarks: "The replacement concepts, which I call ascending truth and descending truth, can do this job perfectly, and the resulting theory agrees with traditional semantics as a special case everywhere the latter provides coherent results. So it is a lot like advances in science, where the successor theory does everything that the earlier theory did, and solves some extra problems as well" (*ibid*).

5. KINDS OF CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING PROJECTS

Not all the theorists engaged in what we may call 'conceptual engineering' (following Simon Blackburn (1999) and also Matti Eklund (2014, 2015)) would call their projects that way; many terminological variations exist. For instance, Sally Haslanger on her project talks about 'ameliorative 'approach', even though at the initial stage of her project she used the term 'analytical 'inquiry' when she describes her work on race and gender (Haslanger 1999, 2000, 2006). Some other theorists use the term 'revisionary project' (Railton 1989, 1993, Scharp 2007, 2013a). Some use Carnap's term 'explication' for a subversion of this kind of project (Cappelen 2018, p. 4).

In classification of these projects, one could talk about conceptual revision, conceptual replacement and so on. Of course, the kinds of these projects are more than these two but I will concentrate on these, partly because in the view of Scharp, these two present significance and distinction that single them out in philosophy (Scharp 2020, p. 405). According to Scharp,

> *Conceptual revision* is changing a concept so as to improve it in some way, but the concept persists through whatever changes happen to it. It is the same concept before and after the revision to it. I think some people conceive of Carnap's method of explication as a kind of conceptual revision by adding a degree of clarity to an otherwise fuzzy concept. Sally Haslanger is often read in this way, but it isn't obvious that it is the most accurate interpretation" (*loc. cit.*, pp. 405-406).

Scharp in examination of the second kind of conceptual engineering remarks:

> *Conceptual replacement* doesn't cause any changes to any concepts at all; rather, these projects introduce new concepts to our conceptual scheme and prescribe a particular role for them to play; this role might already be filled by one of our existing concepts, so a replacement project might suggest that one of our existing concepts isn't cut out for one of the jobs we think it can do. Conceptual replacement

> is the kind of conceptual engineering project I take up with respect to the concept of truth in my book *Replacing Truth*. There I argue that truth is an inconsistent concept, and I offer two replacement concepts that, together, will do some of the work we have been using truth to do. Note that replacement does not entail elimination—we still retain the defective concept of truth, because in the vast majority of situations, we can use it without running into any trouble whatsoever. However, we do eliminate one or more roles for truth to play once we have the replacement concepts (*loc. cit.*, p. 406).

These accounts present clues on conceptual revision and conceptual replacement as kinds of conceptual engineering. However, given a single project of conceptual engineering, it would seem possible to present it both as a project of revision and as a project of replacement. An example comes from different possible readings of Haslanger's project with respect to WOMAN (Scharp, *ibid.*). Haslanger's project can be cast as an instance of revision, where the content of the concept WOMAN is changed, by adding a number of conditions to it. Alternatively, her project could be considered an instance of replacement, insofar as she proposes to make the concept WOMAN mean 'adult human who is oppressed on the basis of stereotypical female characteristics', either because that is the meaning the concept *already has* (and that it is fixed in an externalistic fashion, unbeknownst to its users), or because that is the meaning it *should have*, for reasons of social justice (where the ultimate goal would be to have no women understood in this sense).

6. BASIS FOR CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

In what ways can concepts as representational devices be defective? This question could be reformulated in a practical instance like: "Is X a defective representational device?" (Cappelen 2018, p. 6). In examination and reflection on this inquiry, Cappelen claims that he would answer yes, and if so, other series of inquiries would arise. Some of the possible surging questions would be

- What kinds of representational deficiencies are there?
- How can we assess the adequacy of our representational devices?
- Once we have found deficiencies, what strategies are available for amelioration?
- What are the roles of this kind of assessment and improvement in philosophy and other intellectual disciplines?

> • What are the roles for this kind of assessment and improvement in political and social life?
> • What are the roles for this kind of assessment and improvement in our individual lives? (*loc. cit.*, p. 3).

In a brief view, these and similar questions necessitate the project of conceptual engineering. However, theorists in thinking through these questions bring on board the peculiar nature of their intellectual attitudes (so to say, cognitive dispositions) towards postulations in general and philosophical issues in particular. Two of the approaches in application that Cappelen identifies are the representationally complacent approach and the representationally skeptical method. In clarifications he notes that:

> The representationally complacent uncritically take over the representational devices that are handed to them. They do their thinking and talking with whatever concepts they have inherited from their peers, teachers, and community. Someone who is representationally complacent can be a skeptic in the traditional epistemic sense: when she hears an assertion, she can be disposed to provide counterevidence and opposition, but she does so using only inherited concepts. [On the other hand,] Representational skeptics do not uncritically take over the representational devices handed to them. A significant part of their intellectual efforts consists in questioning and trying to improve the concepts of their peers, teachers, and community. When a representational skeptic starts reflecting on an issue, the first question she asks herself is whether the language used to articulate the key questions is good enough. The representational skeptic does not throw herself headlong into efforts to answer questions; rather, she first questions the concepts used to articulate the questions (*loc. cit.*, pp. 5-6).

It is very difficult to draw a straight-cut-line in identifying theorists in their mental attitudes in reference to these two approaches. No doubt, any approach towards these methods would definitely cut across lines, where a thinker could be seen identifying with the representational skeptic in one instance and in another case team with the representationally complacent group.

Be that as it may, conceptual engineering is the bedrock of good philosophical exercises. A metaphysical inquiry that merits the worth of time would be couched in appropriate representational devices – minimally non-defective concepts. Conceptual engineering is simply significant and indispensable for every philosophical theorist of repute. In fact, Matti Eklund (2014, p. 293) according to Cappelen, advocates that philosophers should embrace and engage in conceptual engineering for a more resourceful philosophical output. He presents his points of argument thus:

> While philosophers often have been concerned with our actual concepts or the properties or relations they stand for, philosophers should also be asking themselves whether these really are the best tools for understanding the relevant aspects of reality, and in many cases consider what preferable replacements might be. Philosophers should be engaged in conceptual engineering. Compare: when physicists study reality they do not hold on to the concepts of folk physics but use concepts better suited to their theoretical purposes. Why should things stand differently with what philosophers study? (*loc. cit.*, p. 21).

David Chalmers (2011, p. 540) in his theory of conceptual pluralism claims that conceptual engineering is not only essential for a good philosophical work but would take care of our communicative defects and bring to an end the challenge of pointless verbal disputes in philosophy. For him, the way to fix this avoidable philosophical dispute is to engage in a form of conceptual engineering (*loc. cit.*, p. 23). In the light of this thought, conceptual engineering helps in great measures to identify defective concepts and thereupon proposals would be made on how to ameliorate the deficiency. The amelioration could be negotiated along many proposals and options (*loc. cit.*, p. 33).

In furtherance of the arguments advanced to highlight the significance of conceptual engineering Cappelen presents three perspectives: one prudential argument and two ontological arguments. In explanation of these arguments, Cappelen clarifies that the prudential argument rests on the basic assumption that is couched as the revisionist's basic assumption. In clarification of the revisionist's basic assumption, Cappelen claims that "the terms or concepts which we use to talk and think about a particular subject matter can be defective and can be improved to address these defects" (*loc. cit.*, p. 39). Then in presenting the prudential argument, he notes: "If our representational devices can

be defective in ways W1...Wn, then we should be engaged in two kinds of activities: (i) investigating whether these concepts are defective and (ii) if defects are found, then ameliorating the defective concepts" (*loc. cit.*, p. 40). Coming up with examples in clarifications, Cappelen refers to Haslanger and claims that if Haslanger is right that the terms of gender and race are less than maximally helpful in pursuit of the project of social justice, then, there is need for amelioration to achieve the noble goal targeted at.

On the side of the ontological arguments for the significance of engaging in conceptual engineering, Cappelen offers two points, which are that: (1) language constitutes the social reality and (2) conceptual amelioration is amelioration of the world. Then in relation to language as constitutive of social reality, Cappelen observes that "the concepts we use to describe social categories are in part constitutive of that reality" (*loc. cit.*, p. 44). He illustrated this claim by alluding to the theoretical postulation of John R. Searle in his book *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), where Searle claims that "constitutive rules of the form 'X counts as Y in C' are at the core of social ontology. [For Cappelen] 'Y' denotes what Searle calls a status function—it assigns a status to things that satisfy the X-conditions (this is a new status that the objects don't have simply in virtue of satisfying the X-conditions)" (*loc. cit.*, p. 44). In his clarification on the relationship between status function and language, Cappelen quotes Searle thus: "language is essentially constitutive of institutional reality. [This is because it is] impossible to have institutional structures such as money, marriage, governments, and property without some form of language because...the words or other symbols are partly constitutive of the facts" (*loc. cit.*, p. 45).

On the second ontological argument: conceptual amelioration as amelioration of the world, Cappelen notes that conceptual engineering is, so-to-say, an engineering of the social world in particular, which could also be described as 'worldly' construal of conceptual engineering (*loc. cit.*, p. 46). In clarification, Cappelen analyses extensively the work of Sally Haslanger on 'Gender and Race' to highlight the instance of conceptual amelioration. His thoughts run thus:

> One place where I find elements of this way of thinking is in some of Sally Haslanger's work [on] 'Gender and Race': (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?' (Haslanger 2000). First, note that the title isn't about the words 'gender' or 'race'. Nor is it about the corresponding concepts of (say) woman, or Latino. It is about gender and race. It asks what we want those things to be, i.e.,

> what we want gender and race to be (not what we want the words to be and not what we want the concepts to be). Applied to epistemology, the ameliorative project, so understood, is about what knowledge ought to be, not about what the concept 'knowledge' ought to be (*loc. cit.*, p. 46).

In a general view, the concerns presented above underpin the metaphysical reason/basis for the project of conceptual engineering. Having given an account of the basis for conceptual engineering, it is fitting that I consider equally and immediately an account of why conceptual engineering is significant.

7. SIGNIFICANCE OF CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

Conceptual engineering is a philosophical inquiry on a mission of redeeming defects some philosophical concepts (as well as beliefs about the concepts) sometimes come along with, which tend to hinder clear representation of ideas and reality intended. Scharp corroborates this point of view succinctly thus:

> Our philosophical concepts, which are the heart and soul of our conceptual scheme, are organized and distinguished by principles that are themselves inconsistent with one another. The result is that just about any time we think or talk about philosophical topics and we try to follow these principles, we end up contradicting ourselves. That is our predicament. The solution sketched here relies on conceptual engineering—charting out the defects in and among our concepts and proposing new concepts that will do the work we demand without causing the problems we currently encounter. Imagine, for a moment, what it would be like to have a consistent conceptual scheme. No paradoxes. No puzzles. Just clarity. We can do it. You can help (Scharp 2020, p. 414-5).

This is one of the goals that this theory pursues. In examination of these goals, Cappelen advanced five points which for him x-ray the philosophical significance of conceptual engineering. These five elements border on: (1) The symbiotically enriching relations of Conceptual Engineering to other Fields of Discipline; (2) Salient General Question arising in Conceptual Engineering; (3) Change of Concept or Belief about the Concept; (4) Limits of Revision; (5) The General Objections

to the Project of Conceptual Engineering. In examination of these points, one would get the full thread of the significance of this project.

7.1. SYMBIOTICALLY ENRICHING RELATIONS BETWEEN CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING AND OTHER FIELDS OF DISCIPLINE

Cappelen opines that conceptual engineering will pattern both practically and theoretically with other fields. He uses the interplay between particular and general theories to explain this relationship thus:

> There's a lot to be said for aeronautical engineers studying aeronautics in general and not just studying particular planes. You'll do much better both building particular planes and flying them if you do so informed by a general theory. Of course, there's an interplay between the particular and the general: we can learn from the particular to build the general theory and we can use the general theory to improve particular planes and flights. The same is true in most theoretical domains—whether in macro-economics or chemistry. It would be surprising—though of course not impossible—if conceptual engineering didn't exhibit the same pattern of fruitful interdependence between the general and the particular (Cappelen 2018, p. 50).

7.2. SALIENT GENERAL QUESTIONS ARISING IN CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

Cappelen remarks that the significant general questions that should arise for anyone doing conceptual engineering are metasemantical, which could also be couched simply as important general question like: "What are the things we criticize and improve?" (Cappelen 2018, p. 50). In this view, the phenomenon of concept is criticized and improved upon. This idea underlines that there is a need for a theory for what the phenomenon under consideration is and how the amelioration of this concept could proceed. This implies: "It requires that we take a stand on what meanings (or semantic values) are, how they come to be associated with particular expressions, and how such associations can be changed. In short, the important general questions make it clear that our understanding of conceptual engineering will in large part be shaped by our metasemantic theory. This metasemantic theory will be general: it will be stable across particular instances of conceptual engineering" (*loc. cit.*, p. 51).

7.3. CHANGE OF CONCEPT OR BELIEF ABOUT THE CONCEPT

Scholars in conceptual engineering make distinctions between concepts and beliefs about concepts. For instance, Cappelen avers that some theorists consider concepts as "constitutive components" of belief (or other attitudes) in one way or another. Some others even integrate conceptions into the picture (Cappelen 2020, p. 8). In the context of this scenario, the focus of every engineering project at each instance ought to be delineated, whether it is on the concept or concerning the belief about the concept.

In every essence, the concern of conceptual engineers here has to do with the "general issues about when one's aim should be to change a concept 'C' and when the aim should be to change beliefs that people have about C. What is the difference and how do we choose between strategies? The answer to this question will in large part depend on one's view of the metasemantic issues" (Cappelen 2018, p. 51).

7.4. LIMITS OF REVISION

The concern on when one aims to change the concept or the belief about the concept calls to mind the need to examine and evaluate the limits of possible revision that could be done. Cappelen clarifies: "a question that will come up in every particular instance of conceptual engineering concerns the limits of revision: how much revision is too much? When has revision gone too far?" (*ibid*).

7.5. THE GENERAL OBJECTIONS TO THE PROJECT OF CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

One peculiar feature of every philosophical exercise is the open window for objection and reviews. A similar scenario is not alien to conceptual engineering, which has high stakes on engineering of concepts and possibly beliefs about concepts. Cappelen hints that some of the "objections…can't be answered on a case-by-case basis, but require a general reply (a reply that applies to all particular instances of conceptual engineering)" (*ibid*). He highlights two of such general objections. For the first case of general objections, he notes thus: "How can conceptual engineering and externalism be compatible? If they are incompatible and externalism is true, then the entire project of conceptual engineering must be abandoned" (*ibid*).

Then for the second case of general objections, he explains this with the objections of Strawson and clarifies thus: “Strawson objects to Carnap that explication involves an unacceptable change of topic (Strawson 1963). One way to understand Strawson’s objection is as a general objection to the possibility of successfully improving our representational devices: conceptual engineering will always involve an unacceptable change of topic. This worry comes up over and over again in the literature on conceptual engineering” (*ibid*).

In the light of the fact that conceptual engineering is still at its budding stage, the need and the urgency for a general theory of conceptual engineering to be developed is very evident. The above five reasons emphasize the significance and importance of this project.

8. CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING: CURTAILMENT

Conceptual engineering as a theoretical inquiry in operation to assuage defects in representational devices is also clogged by hindrances too on its philosophical enterprise. Scharp reflecting on this challenge remarks, “One of the big things that I think needs to be explored is the extent to which there are important constraints on conceptual engineering. I can imagine a debate over the legitimacy of a certain kind of conceptual engineering project” (Scharp 2018, p. 409). Some of the points of argument on this problem circle on: possible defects in new concepts, and whether philosophy is concepts centered.

8.1. POSSIBLE DEFECTS IN NEW CONCEPTS

The target of conceptual engineering is to eliminate defects in the existing concepts. The possibility of defects on the new devices (concepts) would never be ruled out. In this line of thought, Scharp thinks aloud in questioning thus: “How can I be sure that we won’t find awful defects in the concepts employed by conceptual engineering projects themselves?” (Scharp 2020, pp. 411-412). In consideration of his question, he remarks, “My reply is that I can’t be sure that these concepts aren’t defective as well. In fact, I think they probably are defective. High on the list of probably defective concepts is the concept of a concept. It has well-known problems and many theorists engaged in conceptual engineering projects even go so far as to be concept eliminativists” (Cappelen 2020, p. 412). Scharp has these words of advice and clarification for eliminativists:

> However, the fact is that concept eliminativism is unjustified even if the concept [of concept] turns out to be defective and in need of replacement. The reason is that

> defective concepts can still be useful, and even those who know they are defective can still employ them without thereby being irrational…Therefore, although it is likely that the concepts involved in my own methodology are themselves defective, that does not mean they are not useful for this purpose. When one aims to replace some concept, one tries to figure out whether the defect in that concept actually inhibits its utility—whether its defect actually gets in the way of certain applications. If the defect in a concept does undermine its utility for some purpose, then that is a decisive consideration in support of replacing that concept for that purpose (Scharp 2020, p. 412).

8.2. PHILOSOPHY AND CONCEPTS

It is clear that the phenomenon studied by conceptual engineering is "concept" in relation to its "effectiveness as representational devices". Philosophy no doubt examines "concept" too among other "phenomena". Some theorists quarrel with the reductionist tendency among the advocates of conceptual engineering, where the idea of a "concept" is overindulged as a philosophical point of inquiry. For Scharp, the critic of conceptual engineering contends that philosophy is not the study of concepts; it is rather a first-order study of *phenomena*. Scharp spells out this view as follows:

> Philosophy isn't the study of concepts at all, so it cannot be the study of what have turned out to be inconsistent concepts. Philosophers do on occasion study concepts, but only as one item among many in other things in the world. For example, there is a difference between the concept of truth and truth itself. Truth is, presumably, a property that things like sentences or theories or propositions can have, whereas the concept of truth is something like a mental representation or a constituent of thought or some other kind of thing that people grasp or possess or understand. Philosophy isn't the study of the concept of truth or the concept of knowledge or any of the other concepts. Instead, philosophy is the study of certain phenomena, like truth, knowledge, freedom, justice, and the rest (Scharp 2020, p. 413).

Scharp in his effort to bring home his explanation here has this to say:

> Another way of putting the point, in terms of subjects or properties instead of in terms of concepts, would be that the subjects or properties that philosophers might

> think of themselves as investigating are delineated according to inconsistent principles. So there are no such things. The very idea that there is something like truth or knowledge or freedom or justice or virtue for us to investigate at all is inconsistent. Of course, we have the concept of truth and the concept of knowledge and all the rest, and philosophy is primarily the study of these concepts (*loc. cit.*, p. 414).

At this juncture, I will take stock of my inquiry so far. In summary, I have endeavoured to address in broad brushstrokes the issues encapsulating the philosophical domain of conceptual engineering and the terminology relating to it. I also highlighted and affirmed that conceptual engineering as a philosophical practice has a long history (as old as philosophy itself) and further treated the question concerning the definition of the theory, as well as the basis, significance and the constrains encountered in this theory. It is my estimation that these few points would give a graph of the task undertaken in this section of this inquiry.

9. CONCLUSION

The effort to examine the theory of conceptual engineering in philosophy has here been undertaken in view of the fact that it is a rich tool in the service of my metaphysical inquiry on gender and race, which unfortunately are social ills still with us. It is my anticipation that given the fruits and values of this theory, scholars and theorists concerned with social justice would definitely get on board this project of conceptual engineering as a veritable tool for advancing the quest for social justice as advocated by Sally Haslanger. This becomes more imperative when one considers the ever-ongoing dialogue for social justice and the crushing presence of these social ills, as they still loom large and audaciously among us.

CHAPTER FOUR – HASLANGER'S CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING

1. CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING: INTRODUCTION

Conceptual engineering is characteristically concerned with the assessment and improvement of concepts (Cappelen & Plunkett 2020). According to Kevin Scharp, conceptual engineering is an active approach to the philosophical enterprise of examination and reviewing of concepts and other representational devices, with a view to midwifing the meaning of our concepts and eliminating the bad components of some of the concepts we employ (Scharp 2020).

Nowadays, conceptual engineering receives the philosophical attention of many theorists, such as, for instance, Sally Haslanger, Herman Cappelen, David Plunkett, Alexis Burgess, Simon Blackburn and Kevin Scharp, to name but a few scholars. These theorists pursue a variety of projects, among which Sally Haslanger's ameliorative inquiry stands out. Haslanger analyzes the concepts of gender and race, and calls attention to the ideologies sustaining the usage of these concepts as well as the meanings that they reveal in application.

The aim of this chapter is to present Haslanger's ideas concerning how conceptual work should be carried out in the context of her feminist approach. First of all, there are *different kinds of conceptual work*. We can (i) scrutinize a concept by focusing on our own semantic intuitions, therefore engaging in an *internalist* type of analysis. Alternatively, we can (ii) explore the phenomena or objects that the concepts denotes – thus undertaking an *externalist* inquiry. We can (iii) analyze a concept with the purpose of eventually *improving or ameliorating* it, once we have figured out what it is for; improvements in turn respond to different needs and have different scopes (for example epistemic, semantic, practical). Finally, we can (iv) trace the history or *genealogy* of that concept. Furthermore, there are *different kinds of concepts* that we may manage to capture in the course of our analysis: some concepts may be explicit in our practices (so-called "manifest concepts"); others may be more hidden, but actually be the concepts that do the real semantic work ("operative concepts**"**); finally, some concepts may represent the ideal candidate for serving a certain representational function, and we should strive towards them ("target concepts").

Haslanger argues that these complexities apply to the case of race and gender. In particular, with her specific proposal on what gender and race are – and relatedly, on what the terms "gender" and

"race" mean – she advocates that the manifest, operative and target concepts eventually come to coincide. In what follows, I will present in greater detail the specifics of her methodological reflection and of her actual theoretical proposal.

2. HASLANGER'S CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING: TERSE NOTE

Sally Haslanger describes her project in conceptual engineering as an "ameliorative inquiry". This theory is her instrument for the philosophical analysis of the concepts, "gender" and "race". In her analysis, she x-rays the underlining ideological contents of these terms and reveals their target concepts, i.e., the information that they portray and communicate in diverse spheres of life of the society like in legal matters, political areas, economic spheres, social arenas *inter alia.* In examination of these issues, Haslanger also calls for social justice in these perspectives. Simply put, the philosophical project of Haslanger is goal-oriented. Her aim is to assess and examine these concepts in order to present what these terms stand for, how they should better serve the goal and vision of social justice in the spheres of gender and race.

However, Haslanger at the initial stage of her work did not set out to do philosophical conceptual analysis but rather an emancipatory exposure of ideologies surrounding the concepts of 'gender' and 'race' (2020, p. 237). Hence, her project is so to say a child of her excurse in philosophical analysis. In the spirit of the philosophical view of Hans-Georg Gadamer that the background helps us in understanding better the foreground, I would like to say few things about the historical evolution of the theory of Haslanger to help put this whole work in a better context.

3. AMELIORATIVE INQUIRY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The historical development of Haslanger's project of ameliorative approach has its offshoot in her seminal work, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be? (2000)". In this paper, she calls attention to the gender and racial injustice evident in society and advocates for justice within these spheres. In contextualization of her essay, she situates it within the society of United States and draws some everyday presentations of this injustice to enable her readers come to terms with her worry. For example, Haslanger submits that females in relation to males are in systematic subordination on political, legal, economic, social *et cetera* contexts. On the other hand, males in relation to females are in systematic privilege along these dimensions. On the side of race, blacks and racialized groups in relation to the Whites are in systematic subjugation on political,

legal, economic, social perspectives and so on. On the flipside of it, Whites and the non-racialized groups are in systematic privilege along these dimensions (2000, 2020). At this moment, she identifies her theory as carrying an analytic task. In her application of the term 'analytic' she has in mind the classical paper of Joan Scott "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (1986). However Haslanger in her later essay changes the terminology to what we now have as ameliorative approach (2020, p. 234; 2012, Chapter 6).

Haslanger submits that in the early stages, her claims on her ameliorative project was sketchy and somehow confusing. In her account she recounts, "When I wrote my paper, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" (Published in 2000, but written in the mid-1990s), I was not thinking much about background philosophical work on concepts, and didn't have the language to express clearly what I now think is plausible. Although I was aiming to challenge traditional conceptual analysis by suggesting that our concepts might be improved by empirical or pragmatic considerations. I left the arguments schematic and unclear" (2020, p. 231). However, over the time, her project was properly then delineated and better shaped.

With these few lines in elucidation of the evolution of her project, I would like now to situate the theory of ameliorative project within the domain of philosophical conceptual analysis as well as shed light on its essence and theory. Foremost, I wish to note that ameliorative inquiry is an approach to philosophical conceptual analysis and there are more than one method of conceptual analysis. Besides the ameliorative approach, which Haslanger champions, there is also the conceptual, genealogical and descriptive methods in philosophical conceptual analysis. In consideration of these approaches to conceptual analysis, I would like briefly to make few notes on these methods of conceptual analysis before going further to dwell on ameliorative project.

4. APPROACHES TO PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Philosophical conceptual analysis as I have already indicated has many approaches to it. These different methodologies or kinds of analysis have different *goals and priorities of analysis.* Each methodology employed has a bearing on the result of the metaphysical inquiry carried out. For example, in examining some of the favourable exemplary questions of Haslanger like "What is X?", "What is knowledge?" (2000, 2020), or even in consideration of a question with particular reference to the subject matter of my investigation here "What is Gender?", "What is Race?", one

would realize that these questions could be addressed through any of these different approaches to philosophical conceptual analysis.

The conceptual method, which could suggestively be called the *internalist approach*, makes recourse to a priori methods such as introspection for an answer (Haslanger 2000; 2020). Haslanger notes that in order to appropriately address a question through the conceptual approach one could consider the method of reflective equilibrium, which takes into account the intuitions about cases and principles. Furthermore, she remarks that the conceptual method poses questions like, "What is the concept of knowledge?" (Haslanger 2020, p. 95; 2000, p. 33). In a related explanation, another theorist Jennifer Saul, in her contribution observes that the conceptual approach would "proceed by examining our intuitions about various cases, both actual and hypothetical, and also by examining the definitions that we formulate when asked to reflect upon our concepts" (Haslanger & Saul 2020, p. 123). Then bringing this approach to bear on the concepts of gender and race, Haslanger in her seminal essay on "gender and race" refers to Riley (1988) and remarks that the conceptual type of inquiry would be interested in seeking an articulation of our concepts of gender and race (Haslanger 2000, p. 33).

Besides the conceptual method, the descriptive approach which could loosely be described as *externalist approach* examines the objective type (if any) the epistemic vocabulary tracks, and in so doing, it engages to develop potentially more accurate concepts through careful consideration of the relevant phenomena, by deploying empirical or quasi-empirical methods (Haslanger 2020, p. 95; 2000, p. 33). So, in bringing the descriptive inquiry to bear on the concepts of gender and race, Haslanger avers that it might ask whether our uses of race and gender vocabularies are tracking social kinds, and if so which ones (Haslanger 2000, p. 33).

Haslanger in her reference to Scott (1986) notes that the third type of methodology in *conceptual analysis*, which is the ameliorative approach, takes so to say an analytical approach to the question, "What is knowledge?", "What is gender?" or What is race?" (*ibid*). In this approach, the inquiry focuses on the "pragmatics of our talk employing the terms in question. What is the point of having these concepts? What cognitive or practical task do they (or should they) enable us to accomplish? Are they effective tools to accomplish our (legitimate) purposes; if not, what concepts would serve these purposes better?" (*ibid*). This underlines that one of the central tasks pursued by the

ameliorative method is to determine what purpose and goal we want the concept examined to do for us, and why the concept arose in the first place. In doing this, the ameliorative analyst is fixing the meaning that the concept in question should possess and hence taking an active role in assigning the ordinary usage as well as the connotation and extension of the terms. This implies that the terms in view, "gender" and "race", would acquire a new definition because of this analytic examination and work. The content embedded in this new meaning is entirely determined by the function it performs in the theory (Haslanger 2020, pp. 95-96). This new definition would be helpful in facilitating the ameliorative work undertaken.

Haslanger introduces the fourth sort of philosophical conceptual analysis, which she designates as *genealogical approach*. This method is nowadays widespread among scholars in the humanities; however, its origin goes back to Nietzsche and Foucault. This method explores and examines the history of a concept in order to unearth the inherent ideas and concepts in the evolving social practices and matrices (Haslanger 2005, p. 13). According to Haslanger, the approach in terms of genealogy has two significant points: "First, our concepts and our social practices are deeply intertwined. Concepts not only enable us to describe but also help structure social practices, and our evolving practices affect our concepts. Secondly, there is often a significant gap between the dominant or institutional understanding of a domain and its actual workings, for example, in the interplay between concepts and practices, developments on one side can get ahead of or stubbornly resist the other" (*ibid*). Haslanger, in her effort to make explicit the operative nature of the philosophical methodology of genealogy, takes as an example the concept of tardiness in the US school system, to unearth the disparity in its application in official setting and in everyday usage. She explains, "In some school districts, there are complex rules and consequences constructed around the notion of being *tardy*. There are forms for tracking *tardiness;* school officials looking out for tardiness; if you are tardy too many times in a year, you can be suspended or expelled, can't be promoted to the next grade, and so on. In the school districts where this is the case, there are local understandings of how to navigate the system" (*ibid*). The context-relative 'local understandings of how to navigate the system' in the case of tardiness for example and, conversely, 'its official operation' point to the two sides of the coin that are evident in the reality of tardiness. This phenomenon is indicative of the many relevant contrasts and points of comparison in understanding a domain or a concept within the genealogy approach. So to say, the inherent differences between the institutional understanding of a concept and its actual workings is very

informative. In a further clarification, there is always significant disparities between: institutional and local uses, public and more idiosyncratic application, what is explicit and what is implicit in the mind of users, what is thought about the concept and what is really practiced with the concepts (*loc. cit.*, p. 14). It is worthy of note to highlight that "within a genealogical inquiry our subject matter is a set of historically specific social practices" (*loc. cit.*, p. 15).

One of the salient points to note from the explanations so far is that these different approaches in philosophical conceptual inquiry have different conceptual concerns. The ameliorative inquiry aims at attaining a certain "target concept" that is supposed to result from an amelioration process. The descriptive project tracks the operative concepts while the conceptual approach reveals our manifest concepts. Furthermore, while the operative concept could be hidden and remain implicit, it remains the concept that is employed in practice. On the other hand, the manifest concept is the intuitive one and it presents itself more explicitly. The target concept, in turn, is the concept that could best serve the (legitimate) purpose of our inquiry – for instance, when it comes to the improvement of the concepts of gender and race (Haslanger 2000; 2005; 2020). These remarks also allow one to understand the application of each methodology, because they help us draw distinctions in our conceptual usage.

It is necessary to note that the method that the philosopher particularly wants to employ in examining the question involved affects the result of her or his inquiry. However, other diverse factors also influence the enterprise of conceptual analysis. Some of these factors are the subject matter and intended goal of the inquiry, the type and the nature of question involved. These different factors account for the phenomenon where philosophical analysts examining the same question arrive at different results (Haslanger 2020, p. 96). Haslanger while addressing this frequent phenomenon clarifies it by drawing our attention to an episode in the case of race. She remarks:

> Where one philosopher might assume that an adequate analysis must capture our ordinary intuitions, another may take for granted that a priori reflection is likely to be systematically misleading when we are trying to understand the social domain. In fact, recent work on race provides an excellent example of the diversity of approaches. Some authors are engaged in a conceptual project, attempting to explicate our ordinary understanding of race (Appiah 1996, Zack 1997, Hardimon

> 2003, Mallon 2004); others are attempting to determine what, if any, natural kind we are referring to by our racial terms (Appiah 1996, Kitcher 1999, Andreason 2000, Zack 2002, Glasgow 2003); others have pursued genealogy (Omi and Winant 1994); still others are invested in what I will call ameliorative projects, raising normative questions about how we should understand race, not only how we currently do (Gooding-Williams 1998, Alcoff 2000) (Haslanger 2020, p. 96).

This notwithstanding, it is significant to note that the different approaches to philosophical analysis of concept intertwine, that is, they are interconnected with one another, even though they have different subject matters as well as goals. Just to clarify this point here with an example. The ameliorative project pursues "an analytic approach in defining the metaphysical concepts of gender and race but the analytic objectives here are linked to the descriptive project of determining whether our gender and race vocabularies in fact track social kinds that are typically obscured by the manifest content of our everyday gender and race concepts" (Haslanger 2000, p. 34).

So far, I have situated the methodology that Haslanger calls 'ameliorative analysis' in the context of her philosophical analysis of concepts; I will now move on in elaboration of her theory.

5. AMELIORATIVE INQUIRY: DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS

This is the philosophical project of Sally Haslanger in her analysis of the concept of gender and race. In a way of clarification, an ameliorative project concerns itself with intuitively analyzing the content of a given concept as well as the operation of the concept in the society to arrive at the meaning and understanding that would better serve the purpose for the employment of such concepts and terms. Haslanger, by availing herself of this semantic methodology, explores how the concepts of gender and race in the society are employed as well as address other intricate issues surrounding the topic of 'gender' and 'race'. She takes the American society as a primary context of her philosophical investigation. She raises normative questions on the ordinary usage of these concepts and engages in elucidation of how these concepts should be understood, and not just how we currently do, and endeavors to spur a critical reflection on what we want these concepts to do for us in the society.

It is worthy of note that ameliorative inquiry per se is not completely novel, when one understands it as a form of revisionary project. On its own, revisionary projects in philosophy are as old as philosophy itself. In her work, however, Haslanger unearths two specific forms of amelioration: epistemic and semantic. I will shortly highlight the content of these types of amelioration before proceeding further.

6. KINDS OF AMELIORATION: CLARIFICATION

As I have already indicated, amelioration could be epistemic or semantic and each of these kinds have further sub-divisions. The epistemic type of amelioration is in the business of improving our understanding of the informational content of concepts (Haslanger 2020, p. 242). The subdivision of epistemic amelioration come in refinement and experiential access. In the case of refinement, the analysts improves the content of the employed concepts as they gain more and better knowledge concerning these concepts over the passage of time. This scenario plays out because at the initial stage, the analysts did not yet possess full knowledge of the concept(s) in question (*ibid*). As to experiential access, Haslanger explains, "We improve our access [of] the informational content, gaining more reliable or illuminating access by different modes of presentation, for example those who experienced war with "boots on the ground" have a different appreciation of what war is" (*ibid*).

The semantic amelioration could also be called informational amelioration. Semantic amelioration could come in the form of alethic, pragmatic or moral types. Haslanger while explaining semantic amelioration couches it succinctly thus, "We change what partition of logical space the term or concept represents, that is, we undertake to change our thought and talk to do better in tracking reality" (*ibid*). In alethic semantic amelioration, the analysts are concerned with improving their available resources in reference to accessing truths as well as what the concepts represent. Haslanger presents some examples to help drive home the task of alethic semantic amelioration. She remarks, "A biological account of race prevents us from tracking important truths about race. [However], making these truths articulable using a social constructionist account can unmask ideology; it can also shine a light on new (emancipatory) possibilities" (*ibid*).

Semantic amelioration could be pragmatic in a scenario where what we access with our language and concepts come to be helpful with respect to action coordination and making our life easier.

Going by Haslanger's example, we could say that 'lunch' stands for a light meal at any time of the day or night. By implication, "When we invite a friend for lunch, we convey, with our term, information about the time of the day when we might meet" (*ibid*). Furthermore, semantic amelioration could also be moral in a scenario where the conferred information and the content of our concepts have direct bearing on what we do as well as what there is. Haslanger's explanatory example here is that "if the informational content of (legal) 'marriage' excludes same-sex couples, this is a moral wrong" (*ibid*).

In light of these elucidatory pieces of information on ameliorative inquiry, I will now switch over to examine Haslanger's ameliorative theory on the concepts of 'gender' and 'race'.

7. AMELIORATIVE INQUIRY ON GENDER AND RACE

The metaphysical topics of 'gender' and 'race' present daunting challenges for analysts. One of these challenges is the category of the concepts of 'gender' and 'race', which scholars account for differently. Haslanger in her ameliorative inquiry leads the philosophical investigation into the category of the concepts of 'gender' and 'race'. The different approaches to the analysis of these concepts and the goal(s) of the inquiry by theorists account for this development. In addition to the consideration of these categories, Haslanger also concerned herself with how to navigate through this quagmire of different accounts arising in this inquiry. To this effect, she advocates for cooperation in analysis to enrich the fruit of the philosophical investigation. I will focus my consideration on two themes: Haslanger's challenge of the categories and the subsequent developments she gestures towards and recommends. In limiting my focus to these two aspects, it does not imply that I do not reckon other themes significant.

7.1. CHALLENGING THE CATEGORIES OF GENDER AND RACE

The nature of the category of the terms "gender" and "race" is of great concern among scholars. It is plausible to say that they are *per se* unclear or at best that it is unclear to some analysts. Reflecting on this perspective Haslanger remarks:

> When we talk of gender and race, at one level it is pretty clear what we're talking about. Although there are cases where it is hard to tell from casual observation what race or gender a person is, and although there are borderline cases in which our ordinary criteria don't give us a clear answer, we are all pretty well versed in the

> practice of assigning people a race and a gender. Yet, at another level, it is not so clear what we mean when we say "I'm a white woman" or "Barack Obama is a black man" (Haslanger 2005, p. 10).

In an effort to elucidate further the nature of this complexity (the category of gender and race) arising here, Haslanger refers to the positions held by feminists and race theorists like eliminativists thus:

> Race eliminativists maintain that talk of races is vacuous (no one is white or black, Asian or Latino, because there are no races); others argue that race continues to be a meaningful biological kind; and still others argue that race is a social category. Feminists have questioned the legitimacy of dividing us into two sexes, males and females, and many have grown dubious of the sex/gender distinction altogether; in everyday discourse, the term 'gender' now seems to be equivalent to 'sex'; and yet many feminist theorists still argue that gender is a social category. How do we make sense of this? Are the apparent disagreements real disagreements, or are the different parties to these discussions really talking about different things? (*ibid*).

These noticeable controversies notwithstanding, Haslanger holds that talk about "gender" and "race" is underpinned by social construction (2000, 2020). She bases her position on her conviction that "gender and race are real categories to be defined in terms of social positions" (Haslanger 2000, p. 38; 2005, pp. 10-11). Evidence of this comes in the perception and treatment women and racialized group receive in society, as well as the structural echelon they occupy in social, economic, political, legal spheres of the society. She maintains also that gender and race are categories defined hierarchically. In this perspective, women are in subordinate realm in relation to men, while racialized groups are in subordinate position in relation to the Whites (Haslanger 2000, p. 38). Haslanger while presenting her arguments on these perspectives, that is, that gender and race have social and hierarchical undertones, presents her distinctive definitions of woman and racialized group. One the side of woman, the definitions run thus:

> S is a woman iff S is systematically subordinated along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction (Haslanger 2000, p. 39)

Analyzing this account of woman, Haslanger underlines the oppression that women experience. Her account in this perspective goes like this,

> S is a woman iff
>
> i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction;
>
> ii) That S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S's society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
>
> iii) The fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination, i.e., *along some dimensions*, S's social position is oppressive, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination (Haslanger 2000, p. 42)

On the flipside of it, to be a man is to be systematically privileged because of bodily features, which are also associated with the reproductive role. In this line of thought, Haslanger presents this as an account of man,

> S is a man iff S is systematically privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.), and S is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of a male's biological role in reproduction (Haslanger 2000, p. 39).

Then on the side of race and racialized groups, Haslanger remarks:

> A group is racialized (in context C) iff its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in C), and the group is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (2012, p. 251).

In view of the highlights of the above accounts, which underline the systematic subordination (and oppression) of women and the racialized group, Haslanger argues that the concerns raised are glaring. While emphasizing her argument, she submits and reiterates that for anyone to accept to be in the company of race eliminativists would amount to paying less attention to the glaring social structures and arrangements especially in United States, which among other things give room for

the push for social justice on racial parlance. She reiterates her position with an example in an effort to make evident and more pronounced her claims. She writes thus, "on my view, to say that I am a white woman is to situate me in a complicated and interconnected system of privilege and subordination that are triggered by interpretations of my physical capacities and appearance. Justice requires that we undermine these systems, and in order to do so, we need conceptual categories that enable us to describe them and their affects" (Haslanger 2005, p. 11). For Haslanger, insofar as the striving for gender and racial justice is a work in progress, the concepts of gender and race remain terms that are essential *instrumentum laboris* for the project of gender and race based justice. Thereafter, they could be consigned to historical elements useful in understanding the history in the past and trends of the years gone by, just as so many artifacts today remain historical elements for us to understand our historical past (*ibid*).

Haslanger in her theory of gender and race was clear and firm in her goal and target. For Haslanger, the trending controversies on the categories of 'gender' and 'race' need not be. Her position is that social constructionist accounts of gender and race offer both political and theoretical advantages in pursuit of gender and race based justice, as well as providing a veritable analysis of ordinary discourse. She succinctly presented her position and points of argument thus:

> In developing constructionist accounts of race and gender, I've maintained that my goal is not to capture the ordinary meanings of 'race' or 'man' or 'woman' nor is it to capture our ordinary race and gender concepts. I've cast my inquiry as an analytical – or what I here call an ameliorative – project that seeks to identify what legitimate purposes we might have (if any) in categorizing people on the basis of race or gender, and to develop concepts that would help us achieve these ends. I believe that we should adopt a constructionist account not because it provides an analysis of our ordinary discourse, but because it offers numerous political and theoretical advantages (Haslanger 2005, p. 11).

In addition to Haslanger's submission that the analysis of the topics of gender and race through the approach of ameliorative inquiry would yield more for the goal at hand, which is the mission of advancing gender and racial justice, she also delves into the different strands of inquiries on the categories of gender and race.

7.2. HASLANGER'S ADVOCACY FOR COOPERATION

The challenge here is that different theorists using different approaches to philosophical inquiry talk past each other in their accounts of the category of gender and race. In the presence of this quagmire, many questions call for attention: Is there no way to approach this for harmonious fruitful results? What should we make of these different projects? Is it not possible to resolve what race and gender really stand for and present? To these endless questions, Haslanger advocates that we should pay attention to the manifest, operative and target concepts and in a situation where a legitimate target notion is evident, we should try to have them coincide. In so doing, she advocates for a broad spectrum of philosophical cooperation in the examination of metaphysical concepts. She holds that this perspective would enrich the inquiry better as well the result of the inquiry.

Haslanger's push for cooperation among analysts for a richer analysis and more fruitful result is borne out of her worry emanating from the phenomenon of different strands of analysis among social constructionists. In her clarification, she refers to the metaphysical concept of race as an example. Haslanger while presenting her case remarks that diverse approaches have been used to analyze and examine the concept of race like the conceptual, descriptive, and genealogical methods as well as her championed methodology, the ameliorative approach; and in each of these perspectives, different results are churned out. To take into consideration the potential good arising from the fruits of different inquiries, she advocates for reflective attentiveness to the fruits of philosophical inquiries in the manifest, operative and target concepts and in an event where they could be brought together, then we should not hesitate to do so. She couches her position thus:

> When the manifest, operative, and target concepts come apart, there will be different ways to unite them. For example, if the target concept and manifest concept coincide and it is our practice that fails, the best strategy is plausibly to correct the practice to meet the standards we ourselves affirm. In this instance, our practice is tracking something worth tracking, but we're misguided about what it is; so we need to improve our understanding of the phenomena. Sometimes we are clear what we're tracking, but something else is what we should be or need to be tracking (Haslanger 2005, p. 20).

In the face of her advocacy Haslanger takes the concept of race as a case study and remarks, "I would not argue that there is one thing that race really is or one thing the "we" mean by "race."

Nevertheless, in developing an account of race we should be attentive to our manifest, operative, and target concepts and, if there is a legitimate target notion, have them coincide" (Haslanger 2005, p. 21). Through this careful and reflective attentiveness, we would gain some significant insights and helpful leeway on our subject of inquiry. This for Haslanger could come in the form of a situation "where (a) the concept we take ourselves to be employing, (b) the concept that best captures the type we are concerned with and (c) the type we ought to be concerned with coincide. In such cases the conceptual, descriptive, (genealogy) and ameliorative projects yield the same concept." (Haslanger 2020, p. 96). This for Haslanger would be a great leap in the right direction. For her, the mistake of undertaking too different inquiries only deprives theorists of the richness in the result of other inquiries. Going by her line of thought, inquirers should jettison the idea of arguing that there is one thing that a particular concept like race really is or should be. One of the salient points of her advocacy is that, her clarion call would enable analysts gain broader view of concepts in question.

Jennifer Saul while commenting on this submission couches the thought of Haslanger succinctly thus, "Haslanger suggests that … – if we do have some target concepts that serves a legitimate purpose – we should ultimately work to bring manifest, operative, and target concepts into line with each other" (Haslanger & Saul 2020, p. 125).

In summary Haslanger advocates that we have to look in this direction to advance the metaphysical account of gender and race especially as it presents itself in United States and proffers a measure and framework that takes into cognizance the social cases within the context of philosophical inquiry. "In this discussion, I have done nothing to argue that the best way to account for gender or race in the United States is to undertake genealogy; rather, my aim has been to provide a framework for taking seriously social matrices within the context of philosophical inquiry" (Haslanger 2005, p. 23).

The goal of Haslanger's project informs her position here. She presents her thoughts thus, "I believe that social constructionist accounts of race and gender (and other social categories) are attempts to identify what, among the complex forces and structures of social life, constitute a widespread and enduring source of injustice" (*ibid*).

8. HASLANGER'S AMELIORATIVE INQUIRY ON THE CONCEPT OF GENDER AND RACE: APPRAISAL

One of the significant notes that one should readily take away from the philosophical project of Sally Haslanger is her philosophical effort in contributing towards the articulation of the categories of human classification away from the easily held view that the categories of 'gender' and 'race' are natural rather than socially founded (2000, 2020). In her project of 'ameliorative inquiry', she teamed up with scholars in humanities and social sciences to shed light on these elements and help advance the understanding surrounding the human categories of 'gender' and 'race' (2000, p. 89). Through her social constructionist account of these terms, she "unmask(s) the ideological assumptions that gender and race are "natural", "given" or grounded simply in features of one's body, by shifting attention to the sources and consequences of those identities" (Haslanger 2000, pp. 235-236). Haslanger's conviction is that "agents who come to understand the historical and political context of their gender and race identification and the role of their identification in perpetuating their own oppression and the oppression of others, will be taking a first step in the process of emancipation" (Haslanger 2000, p. 236). Her position here emanates from her realization that "races and genders are real categories to be defined in terms of social positions" (Haslanger 2005, pp. 10-11). Going by this, she uses the United States' environment as point of reference and reiterates that, "to deny that people are raced and gendered within (at least) the contemporary United States would be to ignore facts about our social arrangements that those who seek justice cannot ignore" (Haslanger 2005, pp. 11).

Sally Haslanger, with her metaphysical consideration of the human categories of gender and race, made illuminating remarks and informative conclusions. I submit that any analyst would concur with her position, as soon as they were to critically think outside the box and rid themselves of the age-long oppressive ideologies that create and sustain the account to the effect that these categories of gender and race are natural. There is no doubt that Sally Haslanger in her theoretical accounts made some inferences and observations that reviewers should jettison; however, this aspect of her theory will occupy my attention in the next chapter.

9. CONCLUSION

So far, I tried to capture Sally Haslanger's main thesis with regard to her project of ameliorative inquiry. I highlighted the connection between conceptual engineering and ameliorative inquiry.

Thereafter, I introduced what her project of 'ameliorative analysis' is all about, as well as its evolution. I then tersely introduced the four approaches to philosophical conceptual analysis before I zoomed in to present the ameliorative analysis proposed by Haslanger. I tackled this aspect by capturing the definition of this theory as well as by presenting it in its operation *vis-à-vis* the concepts of gender and race. The ameliorative analysis of the concepts of 'gender' and 'race' establishes that these categories are socially founded and not natural kinds, as some analysts would like to give in to. Finally, I presented my take on the project of Haslanger and affirmed that even though it presented some ideas that merit criticism, her theory stands out in its good notes and the merits of her arguments are self-evident. I would continue my journey on the project of Haslanger in chapter five by addressing some of the grey areas evident in her work.

CHAPTER 5: CRITIQUES OF HASLANGER'S CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING PROJECT

1. INTRODUCTION

In her project of conceptual engineering, Sally Haslanger sets out to develop theories of the conceptual content of 'gender' and 'race' that would advance feminist and antiracist goals. In her analysis of the concepts of gender and race, she seeks to reconstruct concepts such as WOMAN and BLACK so as to reflect the fact that these human groups are systematically oppressed in the context of the law and politics, as well as socially and economically. She carries out her project through the methodology of ameliorative analysis.

So far, the topics of gender and race remain topical issues. Haslanger knows that the task she handles is daunting, and that it would attract serious criticism, just like most critical social issues. In view of this, she clarifies at the onset that her proposals are not the only acceptable ways to handle gender and race issues. She rather wants to provide accounts informed by feminist epistemology. True to her remark, her conceptual engineering project on gender and race has generated many replies by other feminist analytic philosophers. The critiques come from various perspectives, and mainly revolve around Haslanger's account of gender (and the concept WOMAN) and race (and the concept BLACK), her methodology as well as her call for terminological change. I will foremost examine the objections to her accounts of gender and race before delving into the two other aspects of the criticisms.

Even though the authors I will present give different objections to Haslanger's account, their considerations occasionally overlap. The group of theorists whose thoughts and contributions I discuss here do not exhaust the list of Haslanger's commentators and critics. They remain, however, a sufficiently representative sample of the theorists who have helped to sharpen Haslanger's proposal and her conceptual engineering project.

To unearth these critical and incisive reviews, I will not present the accounts according to themes and subject matters. I will rather examine the criticisms by following closely each author's account, and in conclusion, I will draw my own considerations on Haslanger's work.

2. HASLANGER'S REVISIONARY ACCOUNT OF GENDER AND RACE: OBJECTIONS AGAINST HER POSTULATIONS

In this section, I will examine the critiques of four authors, starting with a quick overview of their respective positions. First, Jennifer Saul objects to Haslanger's account, and claims that Haslanger's work is contrary to the analysis of other theorists. Second, Mona Simion calls attention to the epistemic failure in Haslanger's account, which is why Haslanger's project cannot fly. Third, Katharine Jenkins reminds Haslanger that her work lacks the sense of inclusiveness in gender identity and for all women. Finally, Tomas Bogardus claims that her account is a departure from the traditional definition and biological understanding of gender and womanhood. I will now consider each critique one after the other.

2.1. HASLANGER'S CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING OF GENDER AND RACE: DEPARTURE FROM MANY FEMINISTS' ACCOUNTS

Jennifer Saul claims that Haslanger's account on the topics of gender and race departs from the understanding other feminists would favour. She notes that Haslanger "focuses not on self-conceptions or patterns of behavior but instead on position occupied in a hierarchical society" (Haslanger & Saul 2020, p. 121). I will discuss Saul's examination of Haslanger's conceptual engineering of gender and race under two subtitles, namely, Saul's consideration of Haslanger's conceptual engineering of 'gender' and 'woman' on the one hand and, on the other hand, Saul's analysis of Haslanger's account of 'race' and 'Blacks'. I want to split Saul's account within these sub-headings so that I could present them more incisively.

2.1.1. SAUL'S CONSIDERATION OF HASLANGER'S CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING OF GENDER AND WOMAN

Saul remarks that Haslanger distinguishes between the concepts of 'gender' and 'sex', 'female' and 'woman'. She employs the concept of 'gender' as a social notion, and of 'sex' as a biological term. By implication, gender is the social meaning of sex. On the other hand, she refers to 'female' and 'male' as concepts pertaining to sex, while 'woman' and 'man' are gender terms. With the help of this distinction, Haslanger goes ahead to say that the social roles of women are quite different from their biological roles. Furthermore, it is possible to change the social roles of women without tampering with their biological roles (*loc. cit.*, pp. 120-121). Saul opines that Haslanger moves further to draw attention to the social positions women occupy in relation to men, whereas women

are in a position of subordination, men are in social positions of privilege. With the aid of this clarification, Haslanger comes to define "gender" and "women" from the prism of the social hierarchy that subjugates women along the dimensions of economy, law, but also socially, politically, etc. On the flipside of it, she defines men as occupying hierarchical social positions of privilege along these dimensions. By the implication of this definition, women are in relation to men systematically subordinated; and only subjugated females are real women while females who escape this systemic oppression do not count as women. Saul claims that Haslanger's understanding of 'gender' and 'women' differs from the accounts many feminists and theorists would favour. To this effect, Saul states that Haslanger's account is rather at odds with intuitions. She calls attention on a few lines of Haslanger's account:

- A man who decides that he wants to become a woman would not take himself to be deciding that he wants to be subordinated.
- Many females consider themselves women but do not take themselves to be systematically subordinated.
- An unsubordinated woman seems, intuitively, to be logically possible, even though it is not possible in Haslanger's account. Indeed, most feminists take themselves to be working for an end to women's subordination, and take this goal to be possible (*loc. cit.*, p. 123).

In defense of her analysis, Haslanger may respond that her definition serves the theoretical purpose of advancing the advocacy for sexual justice. Therefore, her definition deserves the attention of all those who share her feminist goal because, if Haslanger's proposal is on the right track, its purpose is not so much that of describing what a woman (or a man) is in a way that accords with our intuitions. Rather, its purpose is that of calling attention on the large-scale issue of subordination (which of course may not concern a limited number of individuals), and to place it right at the center of her definition of woman (or man), in order for it to act as a reminder of what aspects of gender are to be eradicated in the pursuit of feminist social justice.

2.1.2. SAUL'S ANALYSIS OF HASLANGER'S ACCOUNT OF RACE AND BLACKS

Saul notes that Haslanger's engineering of the 'race' and 'Blacks' concepts follows the same lines as her understanding of the concepts 'gender' and 'women'. To this effect, I will not go into the details of Haslanger's proposals on 'race' and 'colour' as noted by Saul. I will rather point out a

few issues that deserve emphasis in light of the task here. In this vein, the term 'race' parallels the concept of 'gender' while 'colour' is similar to 'sex'. Haslanger understands 'colour' as a physical marker of 'race', while 'race' is the social meaning of 'colour'. To illustrate the picture of the concept 'race' according to Haslanger's account, Saul presents the concise working definition of 'race', which Haslanger proposes. She writes:

> A group is racialized (in context C) iff its members are socially positioned as subordinate or privileged along some dimension (economic, political, legal, social, etc.) (in C) and the group is "marked" as a target for this treatment by observed or imagined bodily features presumed to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (*loc. cit.*, pp. 122).

Saul states that Haslanger's account of 'race' and 'Blacks' is more complicated than her views on the terms of 'gender' and 'women'. However, just like in the case of 'gender' and 'woman', the role of hierarchical social structures is very significant for the understanding of her theory on these concepts too. This implies that a subject would only be considered as Black insofar as she or he is identified along the dimensions of these physical markers and subordinated in this way. As Saul remarks, Haslanger recommends that we understand her account of racialized groups from the perspective of the social strata the members of these groups occupy, i.e. how members of the racialized groups are viewed and treated regularly (*ibid*.). In Haslanger's claim, based on real or imagined physical markers, the racialized group are subordinated in the context of law and politics, as well as socially and economically.

Saul submits that Haslanger's engineering project on the concepts of 'gender' and 'woman', 'race' and 'Blacks' are at odds with what many theorists would consent to as the nature of these concepts. In clarification of this claim, Saul reiterates that most authors would not present the type of account that Haslanger favours in reference to these concepts. Secondly, in a circumstance where this type of theory were brought forward, such authors would most likely reject it. Saul avers that, by the implication of Haslanger's account for instance, it seems logically impossible for a 'Black' to be unsubordinated, even though we could point out individuals who are 'Blacks' but are not subordinated, just like Barack Obama. In view of these arguments, Saul states that Haslanger's account is simply counterintuitive. Furthermore, according to Saul, it is not out of place to submit

that Haslanger's presentation of the accounts of 'gender' (and the concepts of 'woman') and 'race' (and the concepts of 'Blacks') departs from many feminists' accounts.

2.2. HASLANGER'S REVISIONARY ACCOUNT OF WOMAN: DEPARTURE FROM TRADITIONAL DEFINITIONS

Tomas Bogardus examines Haslanger's contributions, and submits that she intentionally sets out to revise the concept of 'gender' and 'womanhood'. Bogardus remarks that the definition of woman that Haslanger offers makes subjugation a necessary *sine-qua-non* for a female to count as a real woman. This definition obviously departs from the traditional and biological understanding of womanhood. He remarks that the basic problem here revolves around the socially hierarchical account Haslanger provides. Stretching his argument, Bogardus refers to a *cis* gender, heterosexual, biologically male transvestite and comments that it is perfectly possible they could pass for a woman in Haslanger's account if they occupied a subordinate position on the basis of observed and imagined bodily features linked to the female sex arising from their style in dressing (Bogardus 2019). Furthermore, in a scenario where this *cis* heterosexual, biologically male transvestite calls attention to his gender as being a man, that his objection would make no difference to his assigned gender because Haslanger's definition has already grouped and marked him out as a woman. According to Bogardus, Haslanger holds this view because it helps her further her revisionist project informed by feminist values. As Bogardus explains, through this account:

> Haslanger aims to disclose what she calls the "operative" concept[6] of womanhood, "the more implicit, hidden, and yet practiced" concept (Haslanger 2012), [and this is] the "properties attributed to the things" when we distinguish members of the extension of the concept from nonmembers (Haslanger 2012). (Bogardus 2019, p. 3).

Analyzing further this account as it concerns the operative" concept of womanhood, Bogardus remarks that one

> might have thought that the operative concept and the manifest concept coincide, and that the properties distinguishing women from non-women are just those represented by the manifest concept: being an adult, being human, and being

[6] The operative concept is the implicit, hidden and yet actually applied concept and it represents the role a social group plays in the society.

> biologically female. But, according to Haslanger, the operative and manifest concepts of womanhood do not coincide; our operative concept is masked, she says, by the manifest concept, "understood as defining what women are by nature in traditional terms" (2012, 93). (Bogardus 2019, p. 3).

Yet, going by the dominant manifest concept, a woman like the Queen of England may fail to count as a woman in as much as she escapes oppression. This arises because Haslanger posits subjugation as a necessary and intrinsic feature of women. Bogardus reiterates that in light of the argument by Haslanger, "we should admit that Haslanger's definition is revisionary, departing from the traditional conception of womanhood" (*loc. cit.*, p. 4). Bogardus insists that Haslanger's reply appealing to the feminist goal of her project does not address his objection. He faults Haslanger for pushing forward a definition that she implies offers numerous political and theoretical advantages, rather than providing a satisfactory analysis of the concepts in question. Considering this development, Bogardus submits that Haslanger apparently misclassifies paradigm cases of women and men and further frustrates the cause of feminism (*loc. cit.*, p. 5). Bogardus claims that this is an "internal" problem for Haslanger. To address the internal problem Bogardus here refers to, I will turn to Katherine Jenkins in her extensive treatment of this challenge.

2.3. THE INCLUSION CHALLENGE TO HASLANGER'S CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING ACCOUNT

One of the primary concerns that revisionary projects targeting the concepts of 'gender' and 'woman' deal with has to do with developing an appropriately inclusive analysis that could facilitate the quest for social justice. The inclusion challenge centres on the commonality challenge, which indicates that, as a matter of fact and contrary to Haslanger's own contentions, there is no particular feature or trait that women share. As a group for instance, all women do not even share the phenomenon of oppression. This implies that a concept that does not comprehensively picture 'women' runs the risk of marginalizing a section of the group, which amounts to creating exactly a problem the feminists are trying to address. In the light of this situation, the task remains to find a concept that could unveil the variety of aspects of our reality, i.e. a concept that would aid the pursuit of social justice.

Katharine Jenkins, in her examination of Haslanger's project, notes:

> According to Haslanger, an ameliorative inquiry into a concept F is the project of arriving at the concept of F-ness that a particular group should aim to get people to use, given a particular set of goals that the group holds. Ameliorative inquiries thus make use of normative inputs. The concept of F-ness that is generated by an ameliorative inquiry is the target concept of F. Ameliorative analysis is not bound to comply with our ordinary understanding or use of a concept: the target concept may be revisionary, provided that it furthers the goals guiding the analysis (Jenkins 2016, p. 395).

Applying this procedure to the concept "woman", Jenkins writes,

> an ameliorative inquiry into the concept of woman [for instance] invites feminists to consider what concept of woman would be most useful in combating gender injustice. This opens the way for a revisionary analysis that can be tailored to avoid exclusion and marginalization. Thus, ameliorative inquiry seems a promising approach to adopt in the face of the inclusion problem (*ibid*.).

In a further consideration, Jenkins comments that Haslanger in her feminist revisionary work defines the concept of woman in terms of an individual that is socially subordinated based on her feminine nature (imagined female reproductive organs). Her definition reveals the operative concept of woman. Jenkins indicates that Haslanger claims in her definition that her concept of 'woman' avoids the inclusion problem because it targets to include all prima facie women who are subject to oppression. For Haslanger, feminism should be concerned with these women (*ibid*.). This implies, the operative concept of woman reveals how the concept of gender really works – and this is the goal of her feminist project.

Jenkins notes that a critical analysis of the definition of woman by Haslanger shows that her project did not achieve the task of inclusion. In Haslanger's definition, "gender categories are defined in terms of how one is socially positioned" (Haslanger 2000, p. 38). Her definition entails that a woman occupies socially hierarchical roles because she presents features presumed to be "evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction" (*loc. cit.*, p. 39). The failure of this definition, and of the target concept of woman proposed by Haslanger, is that it excludes women who are not subordinated. Haslanger acknowledges this phenomenon. Yet, she claims that her priority is to

focus on her critical feminist inquiry, which aims to develop an account that facilitates the advocacy for social justice. In this perspective, she has to capture accounts that present explicit and considered values. To this effect, she claims, the inclusion problem does not vitiate her point; rather, it should serve to drive the imperative quest for social justice for women. Jenkins remarks that the inclusion challenge to Haslanger's work actually implies the oppression of this category of women (that is, those who are not subordinated). In a further consideration, Jenkins claims that the inclusion challenge to Haslanger's work goes even beyond the exclusion of some women. She maintains that Haslanger's account does not honour the idea of gender identity. I will examine Jenkins's view on this aspect in the next sub-section.

2.4. GENDER IDENTITY AND HASLANGER'S CONCEPT OF A WOMAN

Jenkins remarks that the problem of exclusion goes deeper than Haslanger acknowledges and tries to defend. She avers that Haslanger's account excludes transwomen in particular and other trans-people[7] in general. To this effect, Jenkins claims that Haslanger fails to respect the gender identity of transwomen. Jenkins, in her bid to present the picture of the lived experiences of transwomen and the implications of Haslanger's account with regard to them, presents four different scenarios that they may find themselves in. For Jenkins, these scenarios portray situations that transwomen may encounter in society. The scenarios run thus,

Scenario 1: There are occasions when a transwoman does not present herself publicly as a woman and people around her perceive her as a man. For Haslanger, in such scenarios she is not functioning as a woman, whether or not she is in any way subordinated.

Scenario 2: In some other occasions, a transwoman presents herself publicly as a woman, but her gender presentation is not respected. For Haslanger, in such scenarios she is not functioning as a woman, even if she is in any way subordinated, in as much as the subordination is not based on the condition that she possesses bodily features associated with a female's biological role in reproduction.

[7] By trans-people Jenkins implies "all people who identify as a gender other than the one to which they were assigned at birth, which includes transwomen (people categorized as male at birth who later come to identify as women), transmen (people categorized as female at birth who later come to identify as men), and non-binary trans-people (people who identify neither as simply men nor as simply women)" (Jenkins 2016, pp. 395-396).

Scenario 3: A transwoman presents herself publicly as a woman and her gender presentation is respected because those around her perceive her as having physical features associated with a female's biological role in reproduction. In the account of Haslanger, if she experiences any form of subordination then she is functioning as a woman.

Scenario 4: A transwoman presents herself publicly as a woman and her gender presentation is respected unconditionally. Going by Haslanger's definition, she does not function as a woman, even if she encounters discrimination. This is because the discrimination is not because she is perceived to have physical features associated with a female's biological role in reproduction (Jenkins 2016, pp. 399-401).

In Jenkins' evaluation, transwomen experience oppression on another level and in a different perspective, whereby the very legitimacy of their gender is sometimes denied. In the light of this understanding, lack of respect for the gender identity of transwomen is a matter of great concern for them. In fact, the non-recognition of the gender identity of transwomen harms their identity and it is a transphobic oppression. Unfortunately, this is what Haslanger fails to take into cognizance in her account of gender and women. Jenkins observes that gender identity is an issue that Haslanger should also have taken into consideration. This is imperative because "what it means to be a transwoman is open to multiple understandings, [and on account of this] an analysis of the concept of woman that respects the gender identifications of transwomen will need to provide space for a variety of articulations and interpretations of trans experiences" (*loc. cit.*, p. 399).

Jenkins emphasizes that a comprehensive account of gender and women should recognize that there are different ways in which gender identities are lived. Going by this development and analysis, Jenkins avers that Haslanger's defense for her exclusion of non-oppressed women cannot serve as a sufficient explanation for her exclusion of trans-gender people (transwomen). In this perspective, since Haslanger's target concept of woman excludes some transwomen, her account stands vulnerable to the inclusion problem. This could be viewed, from a strongly critical perspective, as a failure to uphold the project for social justice. In a related development, Bogardus comments on Jenkins' analysis of Haslanger's work and claims that, to the extent that Haslanger's work does not make room for the gender self-identification of trans-people, Jenkins' argument against her work stands undefeated.

2.5. HASLANGER'S ENGINEERING OF 'GENDER' AND 'RACE' CONCEPTS: DEPARTURE FROM SELF-CONCEPTION

Saul mentions that Haslanger is optimistic that her definition of the concepts of 'gender' and 'race' offers a great advantage for the cause of social liberation that feminists champion. She supposes that her definition would help us realize the oppressive forces at work in society affecting the ways in which we frame our personal and political identities. In this way, it would spur us to achieve positive actions in support of the projects of feminism. Saul outlines the argument of Haslanger (2000) as follows:

> By appropriating the everyday terminology of race and gender, the analyses I've offered invite us to acknowledge the force of oppressive systems in framing our personal and political identities. Each of us has some investment in our race and gender: I am a White woman. On my accounts, this claim locates me within social systems that in some respects privilege and in others subordinate me. Because gender and racial inequality are not simply a matter of public policy but implicate each of us at the heart of our self-understandings, the terminological shift calls us to reconsider who we think we are (Haslanger & Saul 2020, p. 137).

However, Saul in her analysis reminds us that we must pay attention to the other aspect of Haslanger's theory, which Haslanger herself overlooks. Saul reminds us that theories have implications. Theories affect not only the concepts analyzed but also have ripple effects on the minds of those who have anything to do with the espoused postulations. To this effect, Saul admonishes that we evaluate the propositions of Haslanger from another perspective she did not highlight. Saul points out that Haslanger's engineering project is capable of changing the self-conceptions of 'women' and 'men', 'Blacks' and 'Whites'. Therefore, she cautions that Haslanger's project is a shocking shift that could affect the identity claims in these concepts. She couches her words of caution as follows, "It is a shocking shift she [Haslanger] suggests, and it is a shift that – if adopted – would very likely alter the way we feel about claiming identities in terms like 'women', 'men', 'Blacks' and 'Whites'" (*loc. cit.*, p. 138). According to Saul, the basis of the problem is that the definition intrinsically builds the element of hierarchy into the concepts of 'gender' and 'women', 'race' and 'Blacks'. This could be disempowering for the women and the racialized groups, because they could identify themselves as disempowered by nature and, by implication, as trapped in their subordination. On the other hand, it could reinforce the sense of

entitlement on the part of men and Whites, who could feel that superiority is their natural right, and that their privileges deserve protection from the attacks of feminists.

Saul says that a reflection on these two sides is necessary to help us understand better the implications inherent in the definition Haslanger offers. Therefore, it is not enough to focus on the positive side alone, which Haslanger presents. We should look at the flipside of it, too. Saul notes that whichever way the pendulum swings, it is a matter of human psychology. No one could predict with certainty how things would go.

This notwithstanding, Saul remarks that those already engaged in the project of fighting racism and sexism are most likely to adopt the terminology Haslanger offers and that they could positively be inspired by it. For them, it would be a helpful instrument for pursuing their social justice project. In a case of this nature, Haslanger's work would just fulfill one of the cardinal goals of her project, "to develop accounts of gender and race that will be effective tools in the fight against injustice" (Haslanger 2000, p. 36). However, according to Saul, the greater goal should be how to win more converts to the project of feminism and anti-racism, and not only how to reinforce the instruments in their hands.

2.6. THE EPISTEMIC CHALLENGE TO HASLANGER'S ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT WOMAN

Mona Simion reviews Haslanger's project of engineering the concepts "gender" and "woman". She faults Haslanger's work on an epistemic basis. She states, "The project of bringing about better political function fulfillment cannot get off the ground in virtue of epistemic failure" (Simion 2018, p. 2). In her analysis, Simion remarks that Haslanger presents function-oriented proposals for the concept of 'woman'. The proposals ask the following questions: What is the point of having for instance the concepts of 'woman'? What concept (if any) would do the work best? (Haslanger 2000, p. 32). These questions call to examine more fully the pragmatics of applying the concepts in question. Simion notes that Haslanger's function-oriented proposals are two-pronged: namely, they are epistemic and political. The epistemic value concerns their fruitfulness on the inquiry on 'gender'. The political function concerns the social dynamics, i.e., it pertains to how well these concepts serve their intended ends (Simion 2018, p. 4). To make more explicit the epistemic and political concerns here, Simion avers that Haslanger draws attention on the hierarchical social

status of women in relation to men in the society. However, Simion notes that this definition presents a serious problem and a challenge to the project Haslanger embarks on. This is because this definition picks out a subset of females rather than all women. Hence, it does not do justice to the representational epistemic account of women as subjected group. It excludes females who could be said to be lucky and not subordinated in any guise or targeted for subordination because of their female reproductive features. Simion holds that insofar as Haslanger's concept of woman applies to only a fraction of the population and not to all women as a collective social group, it faces a serious challenge. Simion remarks that the concept of 'woman' should not fail to pick out all 'women' in serving its epistemic, moral, social, and political purposes. That is to say, it should remain faithful to its main function of representing the world. This is because the main function of concepts (including the concept of women) is to represent the world as it is. In the light of this understanding, Simion summarizes her objection to the project of Haslanger thus:

> The main function of 'woman' is to pick out women. In line with all functional items, a concept of 'woman' that fails to fulfill its main, epistemic representational function reliably is malfunctioning. Furthermore, in virtue of being malfunctioning, it is not a good concept qua concept – i.e., a good token of its type. If Haslanger's 'woman' fails to be a good concept qua concept, plausibly, it will not be a better concept than its predecessor. If so, Haslanger's project will fail to qualify as an ameliorative project: it will not have engineered better ways for us to think about the world. Furthermore, note that any other functions the concept of 'woman' might have normatively ride on its main function: the only reason why the concept of 'woman' has any political significance, to begin with, is that it picks out women reliably. Were it to fail to do so, it would likely also fail to have much in the way of political impact. If that is the case, Haslanger is wrong to think that we are free to revise our concept as we please, for political gain: the concept's political function rides on its epistemic, representational good functioning. (*loc. cit.*, p. 11)

3. OBJECTIONS TO HASLANGER'S ACCOUNT OF THE CONCEPTS OF GENDER AND WOMEN: AN EXTRAPOLATION

Haslanger remarks that the phenomena of gender and race present fundamentally similar challenges, linked to the oppression of women and of racialized groups. This implies that the phenomenon of oppression is unfortunately a shared heritage among women and Blacks. Because

of this development, she recommends that the theoretical elements employed in treating gender related issues are applicable in addressing race related questions. In light of this submission, I will also claim that some objections arising from Haslanger's hierarchical definition of 'women' (the epistemic challenge, the inclusion problem are equally applicable with respect to race related matters. These objections border more or less on the commonality challenge. Taking for instance the element of oppression, it is evident that not all women experience oppression. By the same token, not all Blacks are in subjugation[8]. As my work already points out, a concept that does not comprehensively apply to all 'women' or to all 'Blacks' runs the risk of marginalizing a section of this population. The bottom line here remains that a segment of the population turns out to be oppressed in the accounts of 'gender' and 'race' that Haslanger presents. This is arguably so even though Haslanger maintains that, in the spirit of her feminist project, we should overlook these objections against her engineering proposal.

4. CRITICISMS OF HASLANGER'S METHODOLOGY

Haslanger's account has also been criticized with respect to its methodology. I will examine here the issues raised in this perspective, restricting my attention to two authors, namely Tomas Bogardus and Derek Ball. On the one hand, Derek Ball questions the feasibility of a philosophical project that aims at being both revisionary and an analysis. He calls this a point of tension in Haslanger's project. Tomas Bogardus on the other hand alleges that ameliorative inquiry is incoherent and doubts how successful it could be. Bogardus calls these two challenges the inherent problems in Haslanger's work. These points of objection would form the center of my consideration below.

4.1. INHERENT PROBLEMS IN HASLANGER'S AMELIORATIVE INQUIRY

In his analysis of Haslanger's project, Tomas Bogardus claims, first, that Haslanger's theory is incoherent because it harbours contradictory doctrines. Secondly, he avers that: (i) either the inquiry would be methodologically impossible to complete because of circular definitions of significant terms, (ii) or it cannot be completed satisfactorily, i.e. in a way that results in trans-inclusive definitions (Bogardus 2019, pp. 12-13). These two challenges confront ameliorative

[8] Obama is a black; Oprah Winifred is a black woman; the Queen of England, Elizabeth II is a woman. These individuals even though they all fall within the prism of women or Blacks as the case may be, but they are not subordinated; they are free from this social vice "oppression".

inquiry in general and Haslanger's theory in particular. One important and clarificatory note to remark here is that Bogardus examines Haslanger's proposal by taking into account her general theory of ameliorative inquiry. I will present his contributions and arguments in the next sub-section.

4.1.1. HASLANGER'S AMELIORATIVE INQUIRY: INCOHERENT DOCTRINES

On a general basis, Bogardus points out that Haslanger and other practitioners of ameliorative inquiry do not want to change the subject of their inquiry. Yet, despite this commitment, these practitioners engage in merely verbal disputes. Secondly, he opines that the practitioners of ameliorative inquiry intentionally depart from ordinary and conventional usage of the terms they inquire into and then move into normative issues, i.e. how these concepts should be used. A further challenge is therefore that theorists like Haslanger end up introducing new ideas that shift the focus from the already existing concepts, yet still they argue that they should be associated with the same "subject-matter". In an explanation he says, "When these theorists inquire into the meaning of our gender terms in this ameliorative way, they're not guided only by how the word is actually used. They also consider how it should be used" (*loc. cit.*, p. 13). He writes further, "Ameliorative inquiry necessarily changes the subject, resulting in merely verbal disputes. And this is in tension with its commitment not to change the subject, but to remain on the subject of gender, of womanhood" (*ibid*). The intentional departure from the ordinary usage of concepts is a widespread practice, which Haslanger defends. In this perspective, Bogardus refers to Haslanger's defense thus, "it isn't entirely clear when a project crosses over from being explicative to revisionary, or when it is no longer even revisionary but simply changes the subject" (Bogardus 2019, p. 15). This scenario creates a web of confusion and it begs for clarification. In response, Haslanger explains that this way of operating is appropriate insofar as the practice would help to achieve the analytic work at hand. Bogardus, while capturing the defense of Haslanger on her postulation in this perspective, presents her argument thus,

> so long as we're warranted in appropriating the existing term "woman," we haven't changed the subject, even if we come to use the term with a new meaning. And we're warranted in appropriating existing terminology if the new use of the term will continue to help organize or explain a core set of phenomena that it was previously used to identify or describe (Bogardus 2019, p. 15).

Bogardus criticizes this practice as switching concepts at will and as applying the already existing concept with the new meaning. Given this scenario, Bogardus claims Haslanger has a problem with her revisionary concept of gender. His argument is that Haslanger's work

> is either trivial—in which case it can't help us settle whether her revisionary gender concepts change the subject—or, if it's not trivial, then it's false, and in any event Haslanger's revisionary gender concepts don't meet her proposed condition for staying on topic (*ibid*.).

In the final analysis, Bogardus states that Haslanger's ameliorative inquiry is incoherent given a tension between the two commitments of the theory, which he summarizes as follows:

> A. Ameliorative Inquiry gives us an account of our existing gender concepts. It does not originate new concepts, thereby introducing ambiguity and merely verbal disputes.
>
> B. Ameliorative Inquiry gives us accounts that are intentionally revisionary, knowingly departing from the way our gender terms are ordinarily used, with an eye toward advancing the cause of social justice (*loc. cit.*, p. 17).

4.1.2. HASLANGER'S AMELIORATIVE INQUIRY: A CHALLENGE TO ITS PERFORMANCE

Bogardus remarks that the second challenge that bogs down Haslanger's ameliorative inquiry is that it is either impossible to perform as a method or it is difficult to see how ameliorative inquiry could be pursued satisfactorily. The cause of disagreement for Bogardus centres on the normative inputs of ameliorative inquiry. Bogardus picks out, as an example, four statements by Haslanger. He writes, quoting Haslanger:

> Ameliorative Inquiry seeks to identify what legitimate purposes we might have (if any) in categorizing people based on… gender, and to develop concepts that would help us achieve these ends… [Then, in reference to the goals and purposes of her work, Haslanger claims that, for] the purposes of a critical feminist inquiry, oppression is a significant fact around which we should organize our theoretical categories… At the most general level, the task is to develop accounts of gender… that will be effective tools in the fight against injustice (*ibid*.).

The problem is that ameliorative inquiry sets aside the ordinary use of the concept "woman" (the manifest concept) and considers what our concepts should be (the normative inputs), i.e., it raises normative questions on how we should understand the concept "gender" and not how we currently do. According to ameliorative analysts, we should understand the normative inputs in light of the feminist's project, her goals and values. This, however, means that ameliorative inquiry fails to adequately take into consideration the ordinary understanding of our concepts of womanhood, feminism, gender etc. This development creates a gap in understanding. In consideration of this leap in procedure, Bogardus remarks:

> If we leave these terms undefined, then Ameliorative Inquiry, considered as a method, becomes unintelligible, and therefore impossible to complete. If we say instead that we're meant to understand "woman" using the target concept developed as a result of Ameliorative Inquiry, this will be no help, since we cannot complete the process and develop that concept until we understand the values and goals of feminism, which requires understanding "woman" (*loc. cit.*, p. 18).

Because of this predicament, Bogardus draws the following conclusion: "if during Ameliorative Inquiry we really are meant to (i) set aside ordinary understandings of womanhood while also (ii) reflecting upon the values and goals of feminism (defined in terms of womanhood), the project is impossible to complete" (*ibid*.). After having drawn this conclusion, Bogardus moves on to address issues concerning the possibility of a trans-inclusive account of 'woman'.

With regard to the challenge of carrying out a trans-inclusive ameliorative inquiry, Bogardus makes the following remark: since Ameliorative Inquiry demands, for instance, that we consider the definition of women that could best serve the goal of promoting social justice for all biological females, but seems to tolerate the exclusion of all biologically male trans women from the definition of 'woman', it leaves some questions begging for answers. The question Bogardus here contends with is: why discard a definition of woman that encompasses all biological male transwomen? Ignoring the violence and oppression targeting this social group implies that trans-inclusive Ameliorative Inquiry is a mirage. Bogardus remarks that his contributions remain a wake-up call for amelioravists to address the identified gaps in their analysis. While this impasse endures, Bogardus advises trans-inclusive feminists to look beyond Ameliorative Inquiry as a methodology to achieve the goal of their project. In summary, Bogardus reiterates, "Sally

Haslanger's proposed analysis of "woman" [and "gender"] departs substantially from our ordinary concept, and also excludes many trans-people [in her work]" (*loc. cit.,* p. 20).

4.2. REVISION AND ANALYSIS: TENSIONS IN HASLANGER'S PROJECT

In her project of conceptual engineering Haslanger analyses the term 'gender' and the concept of woman. She aims to midwife a new conceptual account. She suggests that this account would be a suitable instrument in advocating for her feminist goals. In examination of this project, Derek Ball considers Haslanger's work as promoting a critical and constructive philosophical project. Ball remarks that philosophers who pursue this kind of philosophical analysis typically admonish that "we should not simply take our words and concepts as they come, but we should aim to improve if we can" (Ball 2020, p. 35). In line with this school of thought, Haslanger proposes a hierarchical definition of 'woman' in her conceptual engineering of the term "gender".

Developing his considerations, Ball claims that Haslanger's definition goes contra ordinary usage. He also remarks that Haslanger concedes that her analysis of the concept "woman" clashes with a number of aspects of ordinary and expert usage and belief, and that given Haslanger's view, feminists should attempt to eliminate the concept of 'woman' (*loc. cit.*, p. 36). As Ball further points out, Haslanger maintains that we should accept her definitional analysis of 'woman' if we share her broadly feminist goals, like identifying and explaining persistent inequalities between females and males, unearthing how social forces perpetuate such inequalities, and undermining these forces for the goal of gender based justice (*ibid*). With respect to Haslanger's definitional analysis of the concept of 'woman', Ball queries the possibility of a project being a *revision and an analysis* at the same time. According to Ball, "The idea that something could be both revisionary and an analysis seems to stand in considerable tension with the idea that an analysis must be descriptive" (*ibid*).

Ball remarks that this point of tension arising from Haslanger's revisionary account pitches the opponents of revisionary analyses against its proponents. Ball highlights further that the opponents of revisionary analyses accuse its proponents of changing the subject. The opponents of revisionary analysis claim, "roughly the idea is that if our analysis is not describing current usage of, say, 'woman', it must be describing an alternative usage of a homophonic word, a usage on which 'woman' would take on a novel meaning" (*ibid*). Furthermore, Ball claims, "the idea that

revisionary analysis requires the replacement of one concept with another, or changing the meaning of our words, or developing new concepts, is entirely misguided" (*ibid*).

Ball however observes that, since the writings of Rudolf Carnap (1956), philosophical discussion of revisionary analysis has consented to changing the subject in analysis. He nevertheless clarifies that, among the proponents of revisionary analysis, "the controversy is only over whether (and when and how) it makes sense to advocate for particular concepts, for particular changes of subject" (*ibid*). In explanation of this line of thought and point of controversy, he writes,

> proponents of particular revisionary analyses often see themselves as defending the replacement of one concept with another (e.g., Scharp 2013), and proponents of "conceptual engineering" and "conceptual ethics" present themselves as defending the idea that we can study questions like "Should we use concept C (over alternative A)?" (Burgess and Plunkett 2013a, b), and that the answers can inform our understanding of a range of popular and philosophical debates (Plunkett and Sundell 2013; Thomasson 2016) (*loc. cit.*, pp. 36-37).

In a related manner, Cappelen avers that a descriptive and revisionary project is possible, and that one could both engage in description and in amelioration at the same time. In this sense, a conceptual engineer could first describe the deficiencies of a concept and subsequently develop an ameliorative project. In this line of thought, there is really no tension on the feasibility of revision and analysis altogether (Cappelen 2020).

Ball nevertheless clarifies that he is not refuting the obvious fact that, in the course of theorizing, philosophers can introduce new terminology (or technical uses of extant terminology), or new concepts. Rather, he reiterates that "conceptual analysis can go beyond (and even overturn) extant belief and linguistic usage without changing meaning, and without introducing new concepts. Our theoretical activity shapes what we mean, but it does so not by making us mean something new, but by shaping what we meant all along " (*loc. cit.*, p. 37).

In an effort to explicate the point of controversy relating to change of subject in analysis, Ball brings up two schools of thought in revisionary analysis, namely, the subject-continuity model and subject-change view. He makes it clear that he inclines towards the subject-continuity model,

whereby: (i) there is no new meaning introduced, and (ii) a successful stipulation fixes the meaning of the word as it was used all along (*loc. cit*., p. 51).

Explaining these concepts, Ball observes that the subject-continuity model argues that in an analysis, there is no new meaning or new concept introduced, either before or after revisionary analysis. By contrast, the subject-change view endorses using a word to express a different concept in an analysis. Simply put, subject-change view admits introducing a new meaning for a word, which amounts to changing the subject (Ball 2020).

Going further, Ball observes that some philosophers employ the slogan of *meaning is use now* (MIUN) to defend their position for subject-change view. As a matter of clarification, "the view that *meaning is use* amounts to the view that the extension of a term as used by a speaker is determined by that speaker's dispositions to apply the term and to withhold application of the term" (*loc. cit*., p. 52). Relating this to the task at hand, Ball writes:

> MIUN suggests that revisionary analysts are changing the subject, since (at least to the extent their dispositions to apply the term are consistent with their proposed analysis) revisionary analysts will exhibit quite a different pattern of applying and withholding the term at issue. [In this case] Haslanger will withhold [the concepts of] 'woman' from females who are not subordinated" (*loc. cit*., p. 52).

Summing up his argument, Ball claims that to the extent that a philosophical analysis engages in description of a concept (for example the concept of a woman) without replacement of one concept with another or introducing new meaning, it is faithful to the position of subject-continuity model. However, in a case where it engages in replacement of one concept with another or changes the meaning of words probably to suit its analytic goal, it remains in line with subject-change view.

Ball concludes his review of the project of Haslanger by reiterating that her analysis of the concept of 'woman' is misguided because it combines both revision and analysis.

5. HASLANGER'S ADVOCACY FOR TERMINOLOGICAL CHANGE: A MISSING LINK

After having detailed her ameliorative analysis proposal, Haslanger considers an alternative option. This option consists in replacing the concept WOMAN with a new concept that would be

neutral with respect to social-hierarchical aspects. Haslanger maintains that, in line with her feminist vision, her goal is to develop conceptual categories that would be effective in addressing social injustice. As Haslanger points out, terminological change could be an option. However, I wish to argue that the project of terminological change does not eliminate the root cause of the challenges surrounding the concepts of 'gender' and 'woman', 'race' and 'Blacks'. Secondly, her advocacy could introduce a new set of troubles for analysts treating the issues of 'gender' and 'race'.

Considering my first point of worry, Haslanger's advocacy for terminological change does not get to the root of the problem, i.e., the real cause of oppression against women and racialized members of the society. The fundamental cause of the social injustice is not the terminology applied. These terminologies have come to acquire these negative connotations after years of the unjust social practices against women and Blacks. This implies that the fundamental solution to the challenge of oppression against women and Blacks lies in addressing the unjust social practices in the different spheres of public life, be it in politics, law, economy, *et cetera*. These unjust social practices have their root in the systemic exclusion of 'women' and 'Blacks' from social amenities, and in policies that deny them equal opportunities in the society. Were these unjust social practices to be obliterated, the members of these social groups would no longer experience gender based subjugation and racial oppression. In fact, oppression based on gender and race would become relics of history, which could at best serve the purpose of understanding our historical past. In the absence of this development, there is no assurance that the new concepts would not come to acquire the negative connotations that encumber the concepts of gender and race now. Meanwhile, the unjust social practices are the factors necessitating the advocacy for terminological change. In a scenario like this, it would seem more reasonable to explore strategies that help attack the root of the problem, rather than focus on the mere symptoms of the problem. I suppose, advocating for obliteration of the underlying factors sustaining gendered and racialized society addresses more directly the problem at hand.

In reference to my second worry, Haslanger's proposal could create a situation where theorists could talk past each other in their discussions, and this would be a new set of trouble for them. New terminologies take time to gain widespread application and sink into people's consciousness. In the event of a new terminology, those acquainted with the new term could seamlessly apply them,

while those not yet aware of the new term in town would still be applying the old concept. Going by this understanding, the advocacy for terminological change could render the feminist project somehow more difficult. It is expedient to minimize or avoid completely if possible a scenario of this nature, i.e., to eschew measures that render the feminist project more difficult.

6. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Haslanger has done a great deal of important work with her conceptual engineering project. This notwithstanding, she has some real issues to contend with: these include the application of her revisionary definition of 'woman' and 'Blacks', and the challenges confronting her methodology. These are issues that are difficult to overlook, even though Haslanger has a case for favouring these definitions.

However, acknowledging some of these criticisms, Haslanger admits that her project is a work in process. Therefore, the new perspectives pointed out by her commentators and the weaknesses unearthed by her critics are part of the process. In the light of this, I submit Haslanger deserves some credits for her contributions to the feminist project.

Going by my commendatory position, I urge theorists to appreciate Haslanger's conceptual engineering from the point of view of the goal of her project. This is relevant because it is not easy to come by a philosophical theory that could pass scrutiny in every dimension. Therefore, in as much as we call attention to the weaknesses and analytic flaws evident in her project, we should also evaluate her account from the perspective of the goal and mission of her project, and pick out the inherent values of her account. Going by this understanding, we should precisely ask, what would the conceptual engineering of Sally Haslanger on the concepts of 'gender' and 'race' contribute, in regard to the feminist goal for social justice? What does her project offer when it comes to creating awareness about the injustice women and racialized groups encounter? Has Haslanger been able to contribute accounts of 'gender' and 'race' that will be effective tools in the advocacy and fight for social justice? In line with the points of my arguments, Haslanger recommends that theorists should accept her definition of the concepts of gender and race because they advance the goals of feminism, even if those definitions offer the 'wrong' results for apparently paradigm cases. She says further, "I believe that races and genders are real categories to be defined in terms of social positions. I have come to this conclusion by considering what

categories we should employ in the quest for social justice" (Haslanger 2005, pp. 10-11). Should theorists fail to evaluate her project from this perspective, they would be running the risk of losing the values inherent in her project.

I consent that Haslanger's project contributes an effective epistemological tool to address the social evils of gender and race still lurking around in our society, denting human civilization and undermining harmonious human coexistence. As humans, we would always lack words to describe appropriately the pain of oppression in any form or degree. The pain that comes from oppression, alongside the loss due to denied opportunities, are beyond words to adequately articulate. It would be more favourable for the human race if we could obliterate oppression in every form and degree. There is no room to negotiate having oppression in any form minimized. This is where one would appreciate very well the account of Haslanger. I commend Haslanger for her incisive conceptual engineering project, even though objections dot her account here and there.

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ABSTRACT

ENGLISH VERSION

According to Ian Hacking, that X is a construct implies that "X need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is. X as it is at present, is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable" (1999, p. 6). Ron Mallon also describes as follows the central focus of constructionism: "Social constructionists are particularly interested in phenomena that are contingent upon human culture and human condition: contingent upon the theories, texts, conventions, practices, conceptual schemes of particular individuals and groups of people in particular places and times" (2007, p. 94).

In light of these remarks, it appears philosophically interesting to explore to what extent categories that are commonly cashed out as natural, such as gender, sex and race, are really natural, or rather socially constructed. Today's debate on these issues is divided in two camps: On the one side are theorists who see human nature as having a central role for innate human biology and psychology, and in the explanation of human traits. On the other side are authors who advocate that human culture and decisions are responsible for our classifying humans into different kinds. This, they argue, obtains in domains like morality, gender, race and so on.

This thesis will appraise constructionist projects of authors such as (among others) Hacking, Butler, Anthony and Haslanger, with special focus on projects that cast gender and race as social construction. Here are some of the questions to be tackled: what is social construction? Are there different types or degrees of social construction? Is social construction compatible with naturalism and objectivity? What are the arguments for considering gender and race social constructions? Are there relevant differences that should prompt us to treat gender and race differently from one another? Ought a constructionist project also commit to changing the ordinary speaker's concepts of gender and race, and how can this be achieved?

GERMAN VERSION

Laut Ian Hacking, dass X ein Konstrukt ist, impliziert, dass „X nicht existiert haben muss oder gar nicht so sein muss, wie es ist. X wie es nun ist, wird nicht durch die Natur der Dinge bestimmt; es ist nicht unvermeidlich“ (1999, S. 6). Ron Mallon beschreibt auch den zentralen Fokus des Konstruktionismus wie folgt: „Sozialkonstrukteure sind besonders an Phänomenen interessiert, die von der menschlichen Kultur und dem menschlichen Zustand abhängen: abhängig von Theorien, Texten, Konventionen, Praktiken, konzeptuellen Schemata bestimmter Individuen und Gruppen von Menschen an bestimmten Orten und zu bestimmten Zeiten“ (2007, S. 94).

Angesichts dieser Bemerkungen erscheint es philosophisch interessant zu untersuchen, inwieweit Kategorien, wie Geschlecht, Genus und Rasse, die üblicherweise als natürlich gelten, wirklich natürlich oder eher sozial konstruiert sind. Die heutige Debatte zu diesen Themen ist in zwei Positionen unterteilt: Auf der einen Seite stehen Theoretiker, die die menschliche Natur als eine zentrale Rolle für die angeborene menschliche Biologie und Psychologie und für die Erklärung menschlicher Merkmale ansehen. Auf der anderen Seite stehen Autoren, die meinen, dass die menschliche Kultur und Entscheidungen dafür verantwortlich sind, dass wir Menschen in verschiedene Arten einteilen. Dies, meinen sie, ist der Fall in Bereichen wie Moral, Geschlecht, Rasse usw.

In dieser Arbeit werden konstruktivistische Projekte von Autoren wie (unter anderem) Hacking, Butler, Anthony und Haslanger bewertet, wobei ein besonderer Schwerpunkt auf Projekten liegt, die Geschlecht und Rasse als soziale Konstruktion betrachten. Hier sind einige der zu behandelnden Fragen: Was ist soziale Konstruktion? Gibt es verschiedene Arten oder Grade sozialer Konstruktion? Ist soziale Konstruktion mit Naturalismus und Objektivität vereinbar? Was sind die Argumente für die Berücksichtigung von sozialen Konstruktionen von Geschlecht und Rasse? Gibt es relevante Unterschiede, die uns dazu veranlassen sollten, Geschlecht und Rasse unterschiedlich zu behandeln? Sollte sich ein konstruktivistisches Projekt auch dazu verpflichten, die Konzepte des gewöhnlichen Sprechers von Geschlecht und Rasse zu ändern, und wie kann dies erreicht werden?