

# Developing Transnational Methodologies in Feminist Studies: the relationship between postcolonial feminisms and new materialist feminism

## Desarrollo de metodologías transnacionales en los estudios feministas: la relación entre los feminismos postcoloniales y el feminismo neo-materialista

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Recibido: 18/10/2018

Aceptado: 9/12/2018

doi: <https://doi.org/10.20318/femeris.2019.4566>

*Abstract.* The following article is an attempt to establish a constructive dialogue between two of the leading feminist philosophical theories of our time, new materialist feminism and postcolonial feminisms. Despite the fact that new materialist feminism has claimed to share the same concerns of postcolonial feminisms, this paradigm in some cases has been unappreciated among the postcolonial field, even though the two theories actually do have some common viewpoints, as I want to demonstrate. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to highlight the main standpoints of new materialist feminism, in relation with the theoretical positions of postcolonial feminism. In order to do so, I have engaged critically with Rosi Braidotti's thought, putting it in dialogue with the critiques advanced by postcolonial feminist thinkers. After the analysis and the definition of new materialist feminism in the first section, and postcolonial feminism in the second, I then proceeded by envisaging a common ground for the two theories. The importance of this intercommunication is based on the idea that there can be no effective politics for new materialism if this theory doesn't develop its ability to be transdisciplinary and intersectional. It also has to become capable of accounting for the dynamics of power at all levels and with different perspective, as a way to create new politics of identity and resistance. To answer to the challenges and paradoxes of our contemporary era the creation of a space for transnational actions is more effective than ever, as I want to attest.

*Keywords:* postcolonial feminism, neo-materialism, feminist philosophical thinking, new methodological perspectives in gender studies.

*Resumen.* El siguiente artículo es un intento de establecer un diálogo constructivo entre dos de las principales teorías filosóficas feministas de nuestro tiempo, el nuevo feminismo materialista y el feminismo poscolonial. A pesar del hecho de que el nuevo feminismo materialista ha afirmado compartir las mismas preocupaciones de los feminismos poscoloniales, este paradigma en algunos casos no se aprecia en el campo poscolonial, aunque las dos teorías realmente tienen algunos puntos de vista comunes, como quiero demostrar. Por lo tanto, el

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objetivo de este artículo es destacar los principales puntos de vista del nuevo feminismo materialista, en relación con las posiciones teóricas del feminismo poscolonial. Para hacerlo, me he comprometido críticamente con el pensamiento de Rosi Braidotti, poniéndolo en diálogo con las críticas formuladas por las pensadoras feministas poscoloniales. Después del análisis y la definición del nuevo feminismo materialista en la primera sección, y del feminismo poscolonial en la segunda, procedí a prever un terreno común para las dos teorías. La importancia de esta intercomunicación se basa en la idea de que no puede haber políticas efectivas para el nuevo materialismo si esta teoría no desarrolla su capacidad de ser transdisciplinar e interseccional. También debe ser capaz de explicar la dinámica del poder en todos los niveles y con diferentes perspectivas, como una forma de crear nuevas políticas de identidad y resistencia. Para responder a los desafíos y las paradojas de nuestra era contemporánea, la creación de un espacio para acciones transnacionales es más efectiva que nunca, como quiero afirmar.

*Palabras clave:* feminismo poscolonial, neomaterialismo, pensamiento filosófico feminista, nuevas perspectivas metodológicas en los estudios de género.

## Introduction

New materialism is a new branch of metaphysics, based largely on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980, 1986, 1987) and spread mainly in continental Europe, from the eighties onwards. Since then, several contemporary scholars from heterogeneous backgrounds have revived this theoretical standpoint, applying it to a variety of fields of study, including socio-politics, economics, bioethics and human sciences. Among them, the works of Rosi Braidotti, Manuel De Landa, Karen Barad, and Quentin Meillassoux (Dolphijn & Tuin, 2012; Coole & Frost, 2010) have been highly influential for contemporary philosophy. Not being a systematic thought, new materialism brings together learnings from different disciplines that have in common their criticism of the modern distinction between nature and culture. It underlines the power of auto-organization for human and non-human processes and explores how social practices are connected to the material processes of capitalism and desire. Based on the concept of the living matter, it proposes a new idea of subjectivities and a new ethics for humanity, based on global actions. Feminists, such as Rosi Braidotti, have reinterpreted and applied this thought to the study of sexual differences, both by analysing the ways in which sameness and diversity have historically interacted, generating asymmetric relations of power, and by explaining sexual difference as one of the multiple axes by which subjectivities are crossed, de-essentialising yet affirming sexual differences.

I intend to explore to which extent the feminist methodology developed by new-materialist feminism could be put in relation with postcolonial feminisms. Starting from the fact that there is a resistance in accepting this paradigm in the postcolonial field (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997; Boer, 1996; Felski, 1997; Gedalof, 1996, 2000; Mohanram, 1999; Pels, 1999; Smith, 1998; Wuthnow, 2002), the aim of this paper is to understand in what ways new materialist feminism can allow us to develop a feminist methodology able to create transnational actions. Therefore, my purpose is to highlight the strengths and the weaknesses of new materialist feminism in relation to the theoretical positions of postcolonial feminisms. The importance of this study is based on the idea that there can be

no effective politics for new materialism if this theory does not develop the ability to be transdisciplinary, intersectional and capable of understanding the dynamics of power at all levels and within different geopolitical contexts. This may be a way to create new politics of identity and resistance and an effective attempt to answer the challenges and the paradoxes of our contemporary era, through the creation of a space for transnational methodologies.

The article will be divided into three sections. In the first one, I will proceed by describing the main features of new-materialist feminism, taking Rosi Braidotti as the leading figure of the feminist turn in new materialism. In the second section, I will provide a definition of what is called postcolonial feminism, both by highlighting its main standpoints and by focusing on the critiques that some authors have directed towards new-materialism and new-materialist feminism in general and to Rosi Braidotti in particular. Finally, the third section will be dedicated to a discussion on possible ways towards the development of a feminist methodology which could enable transnational politics.

### **By the way of new materialist feminism**

One of the most prominent philosophers who has re-elaborated new materialism from a feminist perspective has been Rosi Braidotti. For the aim of this paper, I have chosen to consider her thought as exemplificative of new materialist feminism, since she put in question many themes later developed by many other new materialist feminist thinkers<sup>1</sup>. The focus of her theory has been on the attempt to propose a new formulation of the subject, as the starting point for effective politics of accountability and empowerment. The new paradigm she proposes consists in a combination of phenomenological theories of embodiment and the Marxist and post-structuralist theory of relations between bodies and power, which relies on Deleuzian philosophy. For a clear understanding of this paper, I will summarize Braidotti's new materialist feminist perspective by analysing some of its key points, especially the ones that can be related to the criticism made by postcolonial feminisms. In particular, I will briefly examine Braidotti's philosophical paradigm of the nomadic subject, from the nomad as a polyglot, the principle of location, the strategy of defamiliarization, the role of the margin/centre dialectic, to the concept of transversality and questions of identity politics related to sexual differences.

Embracing the contemporary historical trend towards transnational mobility, Braidotti tries to define a theory that reflects the features of mobility and transnationality, by proposing the paradigm of the nomadic subject (Braidotti, 1994, 2006, 2011, 2013), broadened by the concept of post-humanity (Braidotti, 2013). The modern view of the Subjects – as molar, transcendent and stable entities – is substituted in Braidotti's thought with the vision

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<sup>1</sup> Considering an author as an example of an entire stream of thought is a risky - although not uncritical - move. Since the aim of this paper has been to relate some seminal ideas of two different standpoints, the authors chosen are the ones who first had advanced pivotal criticisms. The selection is obviously questionable, but every research implies an exclusion that, although not neutral, remains necessary.

of humans as subjectivities caught in their processes of becomings. Following this perspective, the subject becomes the residual outcome of the desiring machine's processes, 'the nomadic offshoot of striated mental spaces and of the body defined as longitude and latitude' (Young, 1995, p. 159). What is questioned is the unity that modern philosophy bestowed to the subject: 'the classical ideal of "Man" [...] "as the measure of all things", later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 13). Humanism is disputed as far as it upholds 'a specific view of what is "human" about humanity' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 13), a view that historically excluded women and colonized people and nature. Therefore, the universal model of man, exemplified as such by the Vitruvian man of Leonardo da Vinci, enforced standards for individuals but also for their cultures, through the promotion of Eurocentrism. Philosophically, the creation of dualisms, illustrated by the dialectic subject/object, typical of all western philosophy (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), is seen as complicit to the logic of Man's domination. Accordingly, nomadic theory aims to dissolve all dualisms (including the sexual ones) in favour of a net of relations and desires that includes humans and non-human entities. One of the ways thanks to which the dualism subject-object is defeated is by presenting subjectivities as fluid in their identities, thus privileging notions of mobility, movement and becoming, over conceptions of being, essence or permanence.

Stability is questioned even in relation to language. According to Braidotti, the nomad is a polyglot, in the sense that instead of mother tongues she/he only has 'linguistic sites one takes her/his starting point from' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 13). Displaced in between different languages, the polyglot lays aside the nostalgia towards a mother tongue and opens up to new ways of interpreting the languages in which he/she is speaking as the means for interacting with intercultural societies and creating bridges towards the diverse subjectivities with whom one comes into contact with. Consequently, it is possible to be polyglot within the language which coincides with our mother tongue. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, for instance, have shown how to reinvent the uses of the English language by challenging it from the inside. As Braidotti maintains, the political practice of polyglottism is not achieved simply by being multilingual people, but by developing the 'capacity to slip in between the languages' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 13).

The rootlessness yet rhizomatic nature of the nomadic subject leads to another feminist practice put forward by new materialist feminism: located knowledge. Rethinking the relation between oneself and the others also means rejecting the fake neutrality of the knowing subject, thus promoting the necessity of accountability for its geo-political location. Following this assumption then, there is nothing like a neutral subject position for the creation of knowledge. By recovering the idea of politics of location, which was theorized first by Adrienne Rich (1984) and fostered by Donna Haraway, with the concept of 'situated knowledge' (Haraway, 1988), Braidotti emphasizes the importance of 'situatedness, accountability, and localized or partial perspectives' (2011, p. 196), in order to build a new nomad epistemology. Far from being a relativistic standpoint, Braidotti explains that: 'a location is an embedded and embodied memory. It is a set of counter-memories which are activated by the resisting thinker against the grain of the dominant social representations of subjectivity' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 272).

As a result, a new relation between the margin and the centre is established. For Braidotti, 'the point is neither to dismiss nor to glorify the status of marginal, alien others, but to find a more accurate, complex location for a transformation of the very terms of their specification and of our political interaction' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 9). The change in the relation between the margin and the centre results mainly from the new ways of perceiving differences that new-materialism fosters. As for new-materialist theory, diversity is not perceived as an emblematic and invariably denigrating mark, but as a floating horizon of exchanges and becomings, toward which our molecular subjectivities have to move (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The focus point of new materialism is the redefinition of differences in a non-subaltern way, through their re-evaluation.

The nomadic subjectivity is conceived as a process, the process of becoming, instead of a subject with a fixed identity. The becoming is defined as a becoming-minor, which means that subjectivities must move towards molecular becomings in order to leave all the demands for fixed tyrannical identities. Braidotti explains this movement through the concept of de-familiarization (Braidotti, 2013, p. 167), which is 'a sobering process by which the knowing subject disengages itself from the dominant normative vision of the self he/she has been accustomed to, to evolve towards a posthuman frame of reference' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 167). Consequently, individuations become impersonal and the singularities preindividual. To the same extent, according to Braidotti, becoming is composed of the immanent encounters between subjectivities. Thus the forces interact in mutually beneficial relationships, exchanging parts of each other creatively, not as individuals but as processes. Radical immanence is explicated then with the concept of forces, which both gives priority to affectivity and emphasizes the specific temporality of human embodiment. Hence, molecular subjectivity implies the 'open-ended, interrelational, multisexed and trans-species flows of becoming through interaction with multiple others' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 89). According to Braidotti, a subject constituted as such is able to acquire a planetary dimension, contrary to what anthropocentric or new-humanist theories assert.

If subjectivity is a relational and expanded self and not a closed entity, then humanity itself is an interactive process, open to each species equally. The vitalistic approach to living matter shifts the borders of life-production from *Anthropos* (*Bios*) towards the broader landscape of animal life and non-human life, which Braidotti calls *Zoe*, namely the dynamics of auto-organization of life-structure itself. Transversality becomes then another keyword of the posthuman, which marks the relationship between different lines of forces, material, symbolic and discursive. It 'actualizes *zoe*-centered egalitarianism as an ethics and also as a method to account for forms of alternative, posthuman subjectivity. An ethics based on the primacy of the relation, of interdependence, values *zoe* itself' (Braidotti, 2013, p. 95). Transversality expresses itself in the production of theory too, through the ability of seeing connections between the condition of women, racism and-xenophobia, the green-house effect, consumerism and so on.

Lastly, new materialist feminist theory differs from new-materialist theory because it critically re-elaborates the problem of identity and representation from the perspective

of women/gender. As Braidotti points out in her chapter on *Discontinuous Becomings: Deleuze on the Becoming-Woman of Philosophy* (Braidotti, 2011), overcoming the molar dualism of the modern subject can be dangerous for people who have never been in the position of using these privileges to affirm their presence, namely for all the minor-subjects that historically have never been fully recognized. Speaking about what Deleuze and Guattari's theory implies for women she argues: 'Women, [*in Deleuzian theory, ed.*], can be revolutionary subjects only to the extent that they develop a consciousness that is not specifically feminine' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 252). As for new-materialist Deleuzian theory, bodies are de-essentialized and they thus consist of the outcome of the complex relations between social and symbolic forces, a surface for becoming. Nevertheless, this means that the minor subjects, as well as the majoritarian ones, should dissolve their identities in an 'impersonal multiple mechanic subject' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 252). On account of this, both for postcolonial theory and for feminism, the pivotal question is if the above move leaves space to indigenous politics and to the production of situated knowledge.

Braidotti herself underlines that 'this Deleuzian notion of becoming in fact may itself be sex-specific, sexually differentiated and, consequently, take different gendered positions' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 259). Deleuzian theory is therefore 'determined by its location as embodied male subject for whom the dissolution of identities based on the phallus results in bypassing gender altogether toward a multiple sexuality' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 259). In opposition and in response to this tricky outcome of new-materialist theory, Braidotti proposes a feminist perspective that involves a strategic essentialism, that is not a re-creation of identities from Molar standpoints but instead offers the possibility of theorizing a becoming for the subject that maintains its roots within its situated history and memory. In particular, the point that she underlines is that embodied memories, together with the politics of location, could allow identity politics without recreating fixed ideas of identity, by 'relocating identities on new grounds that account for multiple belongings' (Braidotti, 2006, p. 69). In other words, Braidotti's attempt is to 'make a politically affirmative use of Deleuzian philosophy' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 277) by mixing it with feminist and postcolonial theories. Nevertheless, the problem of acknowledging identity politics remains the biggest concern of postcolonial theory and even one of the main reasons why postcolonial feminists do not accept new-materialist feminism as a good paradigm for political actions and philosophical theories.

### **An unsettled label: postcolonial feminism**

Postcolonial feminism is a label that has been applied to different feminist authors who share some theoretical standpoints, especially in respect to their critique of Western feminism (meaning mainly European and Anglo-American feminisms). The fields of postcolonialism and feminism cannot simply be summed up in the idea of postcolonial feminism. As Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and You-Me Park (2000) claimed, postcolonial feminism 'is an exploration of and at the intersection of colonialism and neo-colonialism with gender, nation,

class, race and sexualities in the different contexts of women's lives' (Rajan & Park, 2000). If feminisms focus on the forms of female oppression in society, and postcolonialisms study processes of colonialism and neo-colonialism, postcolonial feminisms explore colonialism, gender, class, sexuality in different geopolitical contexts. The label in question however, is not intended to deny the differences and the complexities that exist among feminist postcolonial thinkers, black feminists, latino feminists and so on, but only to highlight the similarities of their theoretical viewpoints mostly in relation to so-called Western feminism.

Most of the postcolonial feminism body of thought is the outcome of reflections elaborated within Anglo-Saxon and American Academic Institutions by migrant women and diasporic subjects from former colonies. At the same time, women's movements and gender issues are included in the work of many postcolonial thinkers that are linked to postcolonial feminist studies, even if they are not directly part of this category because of the different positioning that characterizes them. In fact, the goal of the postcolonial feminist subject operating specifically within Western institutions is to claim its positioning, theorized as at the margins of the centre (bell hooks, 1984). Recalling a more general concern of the current postcolonial geography, namely the interconnections between the centre and the periphery, and the questioning of the First/Third World distinction, caused by the globalization of capital and migratory movements, postcolonial feminist writers claim the need to marginalize the centre and to centralize the margins.

Like most labels or definitions affixed to a certain kind of thought or to certain authors, that of postcolonial feminism has its limits. Whereas some recognize themselves explicitly as postcolonial feminist thinkers, others do not, although they are considered as being part of this stream, due to their 'unacknowledged similarities' and to the implicit common struggle they are engaged in. As Gayatri Spivak (1999) stated in the *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*:

this book belongs on the same shelf as the work of bell hooks, Deniz Kandiyoti, Ketu Katrak, Wahneema Lubiano, Trin-ti Minh-ha, Chan-dra Talpade Mohanty, Aiwah Ong, Sara Suleri. During the years of writing this book, these women and others that I have not named here have advanced postcolonial feminist studies greatly. Suleri and I concentrate more on mainstream texts. Unacknowledged similarities between these scholars' work and mine are proof that we are in a common struggle. (Spivak, 1999, p. xi)

Historically, the first theoretical uprising of postcolonial feminism occurred in the 1980s in the United States with authors such as bell hooks (1984), Chandra Mohanty (1984), Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), and Hazel Carby (1982). One of the intentions of these writers was to make explicit the discursive colonization operated by white and middle class feminists on black and latino women, mainly in the North American context. By demanding a politics of location (Rich, 1984), feminists started to highlight some practices of oppression that white women have themselves implemented, both in colonial contexts and in their motherlands, as a consequence of their relational privilege over the centre. This political point of view was accompanied by a new conception of feminist political identities that could bear the possibility of a common transnational

struggle built on contingent alliances (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). In doing so, postcolonial feminist writers have succeeded in intersecting feminist discourses about genders with those of race, class and geographical positioning. Postcolonial feminisms, as described above, have been able not only to denounce the domain of the Subject, but also to indicate that no one is exempt from privileges, thus denouncing the partiality of an attack on power based solely on the criticism of the white man. By recognizing the systematic ways in which discursive colonization works, even by those who were experiencing it, like women, postcolonial feminism suggested innovative elements that greatly helped to highlight that not only men, but all women and all subjects should confront their internalized sexism, classism and racism, what bell hooks calls 'the enemy in within' (bell hooks, 2000, p. 12).

The themes of postcolonial feminisms are varied and clearly interdisciplinary. They range from disciplines such as philosophy and literature to sociology, anthropology and political sciences. Some of them include a critique of the international division of labour and reflections on the dignity of work and sex work in different geographical contexts (Rajan & Park, 2000, p. 58). Relations between immigration policies and colonialism are based on their common need to write a postcolonial history and to undertake discussions upon laws, religious fundamentalism and cultural nationalism, as well as a joint critique of developmental ideologies. Of particular importance is the issue of representation which postcolonial feminism is addressing by attacking the: 'idea of universal "woman" as well as the reification of the Third World difference that produces the 'monolithic' Third World woman' (Rajan & Park, 2000, p. 54). Therefore, postcolonial feminisms want to overcome the domain and the centrality of the western idea of subject with a perspective that considers race, gender and class and that sees interconnections between them. For this purpose, the concept of 'intersectionality', coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in the United States, has often been employed, although recently also contested (McCall, 2005; Jibrin & Salem, 2015).

Some of the feminist thinkers who belong to the stream of postcolonial feminism have actively criticized new-materialist feminism. The article by Julie Wuthnow (2002) firmly questions both Deleuze and Braidotti standpoints on the basis of postcolonial thought. According to the author, 'Deleuzian frameworks are potentially counterproductive to effective indigenous politics' (Wuthnow, 2002, p. 184), to the extent that they can enact a 'politics of disappearance of local or indigenous knowledge system' (Wuthnow, 2002, p. 184). For Wuthnow, the Deleuzian framework applied by Braidotti has 'a deleterious effect on the possibility of effective indigenous politics' (Wuthnow, 2002, p. 190), and as posited by Patton it 'serves to undermine the power of indigenous movement in a significant way' (Wuthnow, 2002, p. 192). In particular, concerning the postcolonial feminist's critique of Braidotti's thought, we should identify some central points of disagreement, which concern the idea of mobility, the dialectic between the centre and the margin together with the politics of location and idea of the land.

Braidotti's thought has been perceived as the implicit outcome of a privileged position that she herself never really questioned, ultimately incapable of getting rid of the European exclusionary mode of thinking and doing theory (Gedalof, 1996). Speaking about the no-

madic subject, Braidotti suggests that mobility, as the main feature of the nomadic subject, can help us get rid of our fixed identities. However, this position has been recognized as a 'fiction that can only emerge from a position of considerable privilege at a number of levels' (Gedalof, 1996, p. 193), inasmuch as this mobility seems to account only for the voluntary mobility of the privileged class without being able to apply itself to the forced and problematic movements of migrants from the lower classes. Subsequently, Braidotti's dismissal of topics such as the ones of diaspora, travel or exile, in favour of the nomadic subject has been seen as a simplistic way of dealing with issues of race, class and geopolitics. The nomadic subject appears then as 'reinforcing a hierarchy in which the First World feminist stands above Third World women and women of colour, who are the migrants and exiles' (Gedalof, 1996, p. 194). In this respect, subjectivity is not determined mainly by sexual difference, as Braidotti claims, but to the same degree by 'both the discursive-symbolic and bodily-material codes of a particular national, ethnic or religious community' (Gedalof, 1996, p. 199). Furthermore, Braidotti does not seem to qualitatively question neither the methodological framework of Western feminisms, nor the association between 'cognitive development' and 'uprootedness and intellectuality' (Pels, 1999, p. 68).

Another critique on new materialism regards the relationship between the centre and the margin, which in the case of feminist theory is strongly related to the idea of politics of location. According to Kaplan, nomadic theory 'relies upon an opposition between a central site of subjectivity and zones of marginality' (Kaplan, 1996, p. 86). Indeed, the de-territorialization of the subject, as a political practice of resistance, is achieved through the becoming-minor of the subject, which implies a movement from the centre to the margin, by erasing 'the site of their own subject position' (Kaplan, 1996, p. 86). This assumption leads to the idea that a nomad subject, far from being embodied, as Braidotti claims, is mobile, meaning not locatable and therefore not accountable for its social location. Then, the politics of location claimed as a political practice by Braidotti cannot be genuinely applied, as far as:

women of colour and "post-colonial" women are marked by the signs of race or ethnicity in a way that the 'nomadic subject' never is. This is because while blackness is marked with negativity (so it can be placed somewhere), whiteness and wester-ness can never be fully placed because they are not marks, they are invisible and unmarked norms. (Gedalof, 1996, p. 92)

Therefore, the way in which Braidotti accounts for the politics of location is seen as insufficient, inasmuch as the embodied memory that should locate the nomadic subject, is presented as a counter-memory, which is interpreted by Whutnow as a memory that always comes from the so-called 'margins' (2002, p. 189). Consequently, the formulation of counter-memories proposed by Braidotti 'seems to preclude the possibility that the nomadic subject might be positioned as a privileged subject who may be completely comfortable with hegemonic representations' (Whutnow, 2002, p. 189). Another assumption that for Wuthnow is traceable in Braidotti's idea of accountability, is that the desire to move from a privileged central position to a marginal one is not as predictable as Braidotti

seems to assume. Ultimately, Braidotti does not make it clear why subjectivities should give up their privileges.

Moreover, postcolonial theory's central argument for the construction of indigenous politics is the reflection upon the earth, as a site for effective actions and recognition policies, whereas for new-materialism 'land ceases to be the land, tending to become simply ground or support' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 381), as far as de-territorialization constitutes the new relation with the earth. This clashes with the necessity of colonized people to develop politics based on the land. Furthermore, as Kaplan (1996) and Mohanram (1999) claim, nomadic theory recalls important features of white culture in the colonial context, which is always presented as in progress, in contrast with indigenous people, who are depicted as embodied, immobile and objectified. The mobile feature of the nomadic subject is then interpreted as the historical privilege accorded to 'the Caucasian' who is free to move, in contrast with forced migrants and forced settlers who do not really have the possibility to use mobility and de-territorialization as active politics. In this respect: 'the Caucasian is disembodied, mobile, absent of the marks that physically immobilize the native' (Mohanram, 1999, p. 15).

### **A transnational methodology for feminisms**

Theoretically, the question of finding a new figuration for the subject has been the concern of many feminist and postcolonial thinkers. For instance, the cyborg (Haraway, 2000), the eccentric (De Lauretis, 1990), the drag (Butler, 1990), the mestiza (Anzaldúa, 1987), the native informant (Spivak, 1999), the postcolonial (Mohanty, 1984), the diasporic subject (Brah, 1996), the figuration of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993) and the exile (Benhabib, 1992), among many others. The prolific production of paradigms is a response to the need of rethinking the future on the basis of a more inclusive present, able to not cling on to the idea of the human and the humanities that for so long has excluded many forms of lives, human and non-human. Yet, I am convinced that the proliferation of many paradigms is an outcome of the post-capitalist and neo-liberal management of academia itself. Therefore, in this last section I would like first of all to discuss the possibility to develop a common ground of discussion for new-materialist feminism and postcolonial feminisms, in order to answer the need of creating a transversal methodology. Secondly, I would like to make some considerations on the sites where knowledge is produced, asking for more attention, reflections and research on that matter.

The nomadic subject is conceived as a paradigm based on a conceptual image, politically informed. It answers, like other political figurations, to the need of cutting across the boundaries of race, class, gender and sexual practice, by aiming to establish transversal politics. It is a fiction that should help to think "as if", not a description of how to get rid of belongings and identity political struggles. It is a way of thinking about how to build political struggles without being limited to a single identity politics. However, the nomadic subject has been theorized from what is called the centre of power, in an exclusive European academia, an academia that is constantly seeking for the 'new' as a way to become

popular. Yet, is the above approach useful in the search for the right figuration, the one that can bring together the needs of forced migrants, mobility as choice, exiled and deported people? I think that in this utopian hope lies the mistake of both new-materialist thinkers and postcolonial feminisms. I believe instead that different figurations should exist without hoping them to be valid for everyone, not by thinkers of postcolonial studies nor by ones of new-materialism. Ultimately, this is what I intend with politics of location, which radically differs from relativism. For instance, subjects who experienced slavery and the slave trade cannot possibly be associated with the paradigm of the nomadic subject as such. Nonetheless, this does not prevent contemporary black subjectivities to benefit from having a dialog with such a figuration, as I intend to demonstrate. A transversal methodology should be built in order to face micro-fascisms based on identity politics that are nowadays invading the world's political space. In order to do so, I think some aspects of new materialism and postcolonial feminists should intercommunicate.

In her essay on postmodernisms bell hooks started a very interesting dialogue between postmodernism and postcolonialism that I think was not acknowledged enough by either parties. bell hooks deeply criticises postmodernism for being mainly a western project, exclusionary in its practices. At the same time, she identifies at least three aspects of post-modern thought that could be useful for setting up transversal political strategies.

The first one can be summed up by the following quote:

The overall impact of the postmodern condition is that many other groups now share with black folks a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding, even if it is not informed by shared circumstance. Radical postmodernism calls attention to those sensibilities which are shared across the boundaries of class, gender, and race, and which could be fertile ground for the construction of empathy ties that would promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition. (bell hooks, 1990, p. 25)

The need for a new sense of belonging, the precarious condition in which we all find ourselves in, to different degrees and in different ways, the necessity to rethink the relation between humans and non-humans (even considering technologies), are only some of the aspects pointed out by new materialist feminism that could be valuable to create transnational feminist politics. The 'kind of walking nihilism' (bell hooks, 1990, p. 25) that is now part of many classes in different geopolitical contexts, together with global political processes of neoliberal post-capitalism, are creating a common despair among various subjectivities that could and should be addressed commonly, in order to create effective resistance strategies and a real sense of agency. Alienation, despair, uncertainty and the lack of any sense of belonging, even if experienced in radically different circumstances, should be addressed by common sensibilities, that cross the boundaries of sex, race and class.

Secondly, as bell hooks vividly underlines, by posing a critique on identity politics, post-modern theory creates a strong tension between itself and groups that have never had a voice, which legitimately affirm: 'it's easy to give up identity when you got one' (bell

hooks, 1990, p. 26). Nevertheless, even among similar groups, the use of identity politics based on essentialism could be highly problematic, inasmuch as it can implicitly reproduce imperialist assumptions, such as 'the black essence'. Then,

the critique of essentialism encouraged by postmodernist thought is useful for African-Americans concerned with reformulating outmoded notions of identity. We have too long had imposed upon us, both from the outside and the inside, a narrow constricting notion of blackness. Postmodern critiques of essentialism which challenge notions of universality and static over-determined identity within mass culture and mass consciousness can open up new possibilities for the construction of the self and the assertion of agency. [...] Such a critique allows us to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience. Abandoning essentialist notions would be a serious challenge to racism. (bell hooks, 1990, p. 26)

I think that the need to find differences among same identity politics constitutes an important drive for moving towards a new-materialist approach, which would in some way account for the multiple belongings, even among the same oppressed group. In this sense the critique of racism cannot be separated from the critique of 'authenticity' and 'essence', which is not however a critique of 'the struggle of oppressed and exploited peoples' to become subjects (bell hooks, 1990, p. 27). The project, fostered by Rosi Braidotti, of relying on embodied and embedded memories could be a way of developing identity politics without being obliged to recall essentialism. The abandonment of fixed identities for the sake of fluid belongings can be faced by rooting the subjectivities in to his/her/\* embodied memories. Yet, if we want to be engaged in this project, we should reconnect the academia to the realm of concrete political struggles, both at a local and at a global level. As suggested by bell hooks, critics, writers and academics should reserve the same critical engagement to nurturing and cultivating our ties to communities that they dedicate to writing articles, teaching, and lecturing.

The insistence on political practices and academia leads then to the third and last point bell hooks made, the way the academia works and the production of knowledge:

It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentered subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognition of otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specialized audience, one that shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge. (bell hooks, 1990, p. 24)

Liberatory theories that want to change traditional ways of seeing and thinking about reality cannot run the risk of making invisible all the audience from excluded social areas that has no access to the academia. The lesson of Michel Foucault, according to whom knowledge is working largely in the mechanism of power, should never be forgotten. Where knowledge is created and where it is legitimized, spatially and temporally, there is no such thing as difference or local knowledges.

The manner in which the 'local' and the 'margin' should enter our researches in the academia I think has been suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, in their piece about 'minor

literature' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986), where the 'minor' is not intended here as the exotic, the 'new' commercialized by capitalism. What renders the work of studying minor literature vital is that it helps to unravel different dynamics of power and to enable new forms of agency. Minor stories make possible a change in the way of producing theory in all disciplines, by destabilizing the main narrations. Counter-memories, as Foucault described them (Foucault, 1977, 2003), are not possible only from the margin, as Wuthnow claims (Whutnow, 2002, p. 189), they can come from any position and they serve to question the current state of powers in order to build new forms of collectivism and collective identities. In this sense, local and marginalized minor stories should enter the academia more often. In order to allow them to do so, we should have the courage to question the existing hierarchies of each single University and the very financing system that has given us these precarious yet privileged jobs inside it.

The international arena of research is first of all a place dominated by the massive and disciplined use of the English language. I consider this the first astonishing and yet under-explored way in which imperialism replicates itself in the Academia. How will we be able to recuperate local knowledges when the only way to be heard is by writing in English? What could potentially be a way to speak globally becomes in most cases a barrier, a colonizing movement that excludes each person in the academia who was forced to leave her/his own native language in order to be heard by the international research community. This is even more problematic when it happens in the feminist arena. Some ex-colonies have given ground to postcolonial thinkers also because they were English-speaking colonies. A whole set of theorists from ex-colonies using languages other than English, such as Portuguese, Spanish and French (just to remain in the American context) are mostly unexplored and unheard, even by postcolonial feminists. Ultimately, the geography of imperialism and capitalism is still well evident in the production of knowledge and in the management of the academia.

The wide spread use of English requires all non-native speakers to abandon their language. This process is very different from the becoming-minor of the language that occurs with the minor literature, as suggested by Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). It is instead a forced mechanism and procedure of becoming strangers to our own words as the only way of being heard. English as a vehicular language for research represents one of the obstacles to the recognition of local and marginalized knowledge and it should be questioned more. The rehabilitation of translations for papers and conferences could be, for instance, an empowering and effective tool for diverse subjects to speak out. It follows in turn that a self-critique of Braidotti's concept of the polyglot is needed as well. To switch from one language to another and to give up a mother tongue is possible only when you are fluent in languages that will be heard by the international community (first of all, English). Otherwise, we end up using figurations that obscure as much privileges as the ones they claim to contest.

Situated knowledge, as a radical feminist practice, is another effective political move towards the building of transnational and transversal actions. To be situated means to recognize our own geographical and political standpoint, but also to dismiss any attempt

of talking about other experiences of struggle and resistance that do not belong to our history and our positioning. In this respect, I believe that both new materialist feminism and postcolonial feminisms should lower their expectation to find a theory able to comprise every kind of experience. Instead, we should continue to try to 'understand the material conditions that structure women's lives in diverse location', as Grewal and Kaplan have suggested (1994, p. 17). Therefore, I sincerely believe that 'nomadic subject pursues the same critique of power as black and postcolonial theory, not in spite but because of the fact that it is located somewhere else' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 9). However, if for Braidotti the challenge to 'destabilize dogmatic, hegemonic, exclusionary power' can be pursued by challenging 'the very identity structures of the dominant subject' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 10), for postcolonial feminisms, the struggle will instead be focused on the international division of power and on the analysis of colonialism. Even so, one critique does not exclude the other, as long as they maintain as common ground experiences derived from the fact of being part of a global world, such as global warming, fragmentation, feelings of contested belonging, precariousness, exploitation, and so on.

When giving up any universalizing gesture, what remains is a genuine search for subjectivities' material conditions, which has to be put in relation to a general and common level of analysis, based more on political actions and less on universal theories.

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