Who is the Other Woman in the Context of Transfeminist, Transmigrant, and Transgender Struggles in Global Capitalism?

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I will attempt to answer the question of who the other woman is in the context of transfeminist, transmigrant, and transgender struggles in global capitalism while addressing the status of new realism in philosophy in the same context.

Introduction

I want to elaborate on the above questions in the light of the discussion on decolonial feminist thought while addressing some of the geopolitical spaces outside of Europe, or, more precisely, spaces outside the European Union (EU). I want to argue that this provincial, racist, colonial, and anti-Semitic space of the European Union that consists of a long list of “former” West states as Germany, Austria, Spain, Great Britain, etc. (the list of all the “former West” states, as they like to call themselves, is too long), is in urgent need of a radical transmigrant, transfeminist, and transgender decolonial approach.

It is therefore necessary to intensify the political vocabulary used in our analysis of what the theoreticians of the decolonial turn (theoreticians formed by Latin American and US/Latin American context at the beginning of the year 2000) propose
as their point of departure. They rightly argue that the *colonial matrix of power* gallops on the back of modernity, or even more precisely, that there is no modernity without coloniality.

The colonial matrix of power, a term coined by Anibal Quijano, should be understood, as exposed by Joaquin Barriendos in his article “Coloniality of Seeing: Visuality, Capitalism and Epistemological Racism,” as a hierarchical power machinery that works inside capitalism, but under an explicit form that Quijano names “historical-structural heterogeneity”; in other words, coloniality is a series of inconsistencies, referrals, and reformulations of the hierarchical model of power, which interconnect in its dis-continuity, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first century.

This is the position I take when analyzing the European space, arguing that those analogous categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, etc., continue to fundamentally structure our lives, labor, and epistemologies. The most important question here is: in what way?

Sayak Valencia argues that we have to recognize the structural logic and practice of violence necessary for the functioning of capitalism today, and that because of such logic and practice, we could refer to contemporary capitalism as gore capitalism. This consists in a constant production of subalterns that do not exist *per se*. In this respect, we could state that subalternization is a continuous process, meaning that we have to escape from positions of victimization or from the colonial identity that underpins the threatening presence of the abject. Therefore in agreement with Barriendos, let me say that I do not accept as

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3 Sayak Valencia Triana, *Capitalismo Gore* (Barcelona: Melusina, 2010), 10. Gore describes particularly vivid and realistic acts of violence and brutality in visual media such as literature, film, television, and video games. It may be real, simulated live action, or animated.
true the presence of the “bad savage’ that should be visible only as a form of denial of a proper existence.”

Moreover, global capitalism imposed a process on biopolitics that showed — in the last decade, but definitely after 2001 — that it is simply not enough to talk about biopolitics in order to understand the relation between capital and life, but that it is also necessary to introduce the concept of necropolitics. In “Necropolitics,” Achille Mbembe describes the spatial demarcations of the state of exception as the geopolitical demarcation of zones and the more recent mobilization of the war machine. Mbembe concludes his essay by arguing that the concept of biopolitics might be better replaced with that of necropolitics. Therefore, instead of talking about biopolitics, we should talk, in Mbembe’s words, about necropolitics. On such a basis, it is possible to demand a firm historicization of biopolitics with necropolitics. For both Mbembe and Giorgio Agamben, the German Nazi state is a perfect example of the sovereignty of death, or, necropolitics; Mbembe also identifies the system of slavery as one of the primary spaces for the enforcement of biopolitics. Mbembe has also shown that, within the colonies, biopolitics as a form of governmentality worked as necropolitics.

In the logic of gore capitalism, as argued by Valencia, the goods are no longer single, undifferentiated bodies and human life. Here it is no longer the body, but rather its destruction that has become a commodity, and capitalism is “only possible by counting the number of dead (bodies).” Within this, there is a “necropolitical marketing” that produces a change in the transformations undergone by the concept of labor in the last forty years, that is, in the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. In fact, when production is directed towards the production of death (necropolitics, necrocapitalism, and necropower), it is difficult to understand the global production system within the

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4 Joaquín Barriendos, “Coloniality of Seeing,” 145
6 Valencia, Capitalismo Gore, 16.
known analytical frameworks. This new relation between labor and production of death, reduces, as maintained by Valencia, countries like Mexico to “factories producing gore goods for consumption while meeting international practices and recreational demands.” This shows that in neoliberal necrocapitalism the apparent exercising of freedom can only be understood, according to Valencia, in the form of one power seizing the other. This creates a parallel power to the state that does not fully subscribing to it, as it is the case in Mexico, where the narco-cartels and the State live an almost parallel life.

Valencia notices that in necrocapitalism the two dystopian figures of necropolitics, context and performativity, seem free or “traveling” in hyper and post-humannarratives, while non-subjects are restrained, exploited, and dispossessed by militarized capitalist economic dynamics.8

In the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, we witnessed a blossoming of identity politics, one of its most prominent forms being that of multiculturalism, which was seen as a purely cultural phenomenon. Looking back at that period from a necropolitical point of view, I would argue that there is a formative feature to it that has been systematically overlooked: the emergence of the idea of multiculturalism entailed a process of racialization, which functioned as a classificatory matrix that sustained a monopoly on violent classifications by deciding who lived and who had to die. In all these processes, the concept of the “new” human — as outcome of capital’s humanization is subsumed under the unfinished project of Western modernization — stays mostly untouched. The West does not want to deal with it, and, accordingly, engages in all imaginable post-human modes of instituting discourses of authority, while leaving the

7 Ibid., 61. We know that Mexico is not only a state of death but also a hype tourist destination.
present and the historical modes of Western colonial de-humanization largely undiscussed.\(^9\)

**New Realism**

In order to answer the question of the status of new realism in philosophy— which I connect with speculative realism and object-oriented ontology (and, perhaps the “new materialism”) as new, powerful and omnipresent trends in philosophy these days I will refer to Sophie Hoyle’s “Collapse: Contemporary Artists Works Exploring Global Divisions of Labour.” Here, Hoyle rethinks the question of materiality in what is an evermore pervasive dematerialization of the present moment of capitalism.\(^{10}\) Consequentially, she uncovers that we are witnessing a new boom of discourses on materiality within strands of contemporary philosophy known as speculative realism and object-oriented ontology. Today, these strands are very influential in the way they view the “new” human and agency.

I side with Hoyle’s point when she claims that speculative realism is antipolitical in relation to several critical questions. Or, to paraphrase Svenja Bromberg, to whom Hoyle references, speculative realism orientation “towards accepting or even embracing objectification as in itself emancipatory can be nothing more than a bad joke.”\(^{11}\) In response to Hito Steyerl’s claim to embrace “objectness,” Bromberg exposes that Steyerl problematically sidelines the classed, racialised and gendered oppressions of capitalist reality. Within this, masses of people have

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never been granted any “subject status” in the first place and are, instead, rendered mere objects or even superfluous, because not productive, for capital.12

Hoyle argues that, although speculative realism asks for realism within what is seen as an accentuated dematerialization, it is actually possible to see the opposite. She states that the space that is built in such a way is not outside of judgment, but is instead a space of elevated critique and insider knowledge of art and academic circles, which predominantly tend to be Western, white, and male. Giorgio Cesarale also states that, in addition to being institutionalized and branded, current speculative realist theories present themselves as “weird” and as “other” despite being a mainstream subject matter for a lot of contemporary practices and theories.13

In Hoyle’s view, it is clear that

Object-Oriented-Ontology and speculative realism have been taken up by artists in an attempt to find a new means of re-orienting back to the physical, and though it has great potential, it currently manifests many contradictions: as a relatively insular academic term that remains in the realm of the cerebral, and being recuperated by contemporary art [these days].14

Furthermore, Hoyle in reference to Maria Walsh exposes that

Artists such as Mark Leckey, Hito Steyerl, Ed Atkins and Andy Holden are keen to dissolve their subjectivity in order to exist in a non-hierarchical network of things. But could this desire “to get unalienated” be seen as an infantile abdication of responsibility and even, paradoxically, a narcissistic impulse? Object-oriented philosophy insists on the life of objects, a life they deem no more or

12 Ibid.
14 Hoyle, “Collapse.”
less valuable than our own. Does this new materialism offer more equitable relations between subjects and objects?  

Hoyle concludes that  

recent discourses concerning online and digital media and the physical self tend to be user-focused and Western-centric, not looking at global divisions of labour, where if cognitive labour is an export from the West, primary production takes place in areas in the non-West, as well as ignoring technology divides by socioeconomic class within the West itself.

To put it more simply, a possibility for a proposed new rematerialization exists only within a discourse that would take into account the international division of labor and brutal exploitation that is geopolitically and racially distributed. That means that in the international circuits of labour and exploitation, the usage of poisoning technologies and chemicals for the extraction of precious materials are those that are at the center of all our “immaterial” digitalized technologies. Therefore, such processes of racialization, exploitation, and poisoning have to be at the center of any form of new rematerialization.

The Other Woman

Contrary to the problematic and stiff conceptual opposition of the two complementary, simultaneously exclusive categories of men and women, the concept of transfeminism brings possibilities for transformation. Moreover, homosexual and queer positions in correlation with transmigrant positions offer further upturns for a transformative and transgressive discourse. The possibilities for different constructions of gender and sexuality, as elaborated by Tjaša Kancler in their writings based on the

16 Hoyle, “Collapse.”
work of Beatriz Preciado, take distance from the hegemonic discourses of the heteronormative regime, in particular the power regime of whiteness. According to Beatriz Preciado, sex, specifically, persists as the last remnant of nature, even after technology has completed its task of constructing the body. Consequently, Preciado indicates that in the sense of technological intervention (technologies of gender) this relation unties the contradiction of essentialism and constructivism. Thus, we can replace, as she points out, sex and gender with the word “technogender,” because the bodies can no longer be isolated from the social forces of sexual difference.

It becomes clear, as argued by Kancler, that in the last decade we have witnessed a process of disidentification with the category of “woman.” In other words, the category of “woman” as the subject of the historical feminist struggle is being questioned. This also asks for the deconstruction of masculinity and male gender (“One is not born man but rather becomes one,” or “Gays are not men”). Kancler uncovers processes that were triggered by the fact that lesbians, gays, transgender, intersex, transsexuals, women of color, and Chicanas took the stance that the formation of identities is not a fixed category but rather a process of constant becoming. Moreover, Chandra Talpade Mohanty exposes that terms such as “Third World” and “First World” are very problematic, since they can be seen as oversimplifying methodologies; however, they do refer to a given world that traces its own condition of formation and develops different strategies of empowerment. This last point is particularly important for what we develop here.

In her talk “In the Mix: Race, Whiteness and Gender in Popular Culture,” Viennese theoretician Rosa Reitsamer exposes what is crucial for the new theory performativity and racializa-

tion that has the modality of a hyper-social racism. However, what is central to see (in a paradoxic way), regarding antiracism by and within the regime of whiteness, is the two relevant moments at work: on the one hand, there is a demand for us to conduct an analysis of the power and performance of that regime, but, on the other, we see that white anti-racism is disturbingly changing into a paradoxical instrument of “white self-love.” This is today heavily criticized by black and migrant positions; white anti-racism is increasingly acquiring a form of grandiose anti-racism that goes into the direction of self-promotion, which also transforms into what is termed “charitable anti-racism,” that is just a different form of unreflected racism.

A new perspective is necessary for the future, as well as a new context in order to rethink the position of the other woman today in relation to new realism. The term transfeminism is, as presented by Triana, attributed to Diana Couvant, who used it during an event at Yale University in 1992. Along the same conceptual lines, Couvant and Emi Koyama launched a website in 2000 called “transfeminism.org,” created to promote a proposed anthology of transfeminism, with the aim of introducing the concept into academia and connecting people in order to work on projects and issues related to the concept. Hence, in such a context, transfeminism can be understood as a migrant and relational movement and as the articulation of both thought and social resistance, which remains a firm response to dominant systems of representation and repression in relation to feminist struggles and the fight for equal rights in certain geopolitically diverse spaces.

Triana reports that transfeminism can be drawn into four major lines of agencies, movements, and demands:

19 Rosa Reitsamer, “In the Mix: Race, Whiteness and Gender in Popular Culture,” a paper presented at a public lecture held in the framework of The City of Women Festival in Ljubljana on October 13, 2005.
21 Cf. Triana, “Transfeminist Theory.”
22 Ibid.
1. The US feminisms of color from Third Worlds, composed of Chicana feminists, African American, Native American, Asian American and postcolonial positions.

2. Sexual dissent and epistemic geopolitical shifts from the South that effectuate a reading from queer to cuir [kvir], a wrongly accentuated pidgin pronunciation by the minorities, which is consciously employed.

3. The movement which asks for depathologization of trans identities (STP, International Campaign Stop Trans Pathologization) and the pro-fucking motion in favor of de-stigmatization and legalization of sex work.

4. A key element is to become minority, while being included in migration economic insecurity circles.

Consequently, transmigrant, transfeminist, and transgender struggles have to be put at the center of investigation and contestation of the relations of capital, power and labor, expropriated surplus value and created superfluous populations, the intensified militarization and deprivation of capitalism, and, last but not least, the Western, occidental, white matrix of power, which is the matrix of pure colonial violence.

To conclude, departing from the most influential book in academic feminism and queer theory, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity by Judith Butler, and taking into account the ideas I have tried to develop regarding realism, wo/man, racializations and necrocapitalism on one hand, and transfeminism and transmigration, materialism and agency, on the other, I will propose another platform of insurgency for the new decade of the twenty-first century.

The title of this platform will be Race Trouble: Transfeminism and Dehumanization, still to be rewritten in order to discuss the place of wo/man, race, and class in the violent dispossession processes within global necrocapitalism, while also rearticulating political agencies for the future.

Ibid.