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“Womanspace”, Geobodies and Borderlands

It is time to radically rethink the question of the political – is how contemporary theorist Enrique Dussel explained the motive to write his Twenty (20) Theses on Politics [20 Tesis de política], almost six years ago. In one of his theses he stated that the radical transmutation of the political system is actually a “response to new interventions by the oppressed and excluded” (Dussel 112), or in other words, that it relies on other spaces and impulses of the political, namely on those which are dedicated to engaging in critical, that is, liberating actions. A year ago, in a joint public conversation between two leading feminist theorists – Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak – organized by the Centre for Postcolonial Theory in Frankfurt in May 2011 and devoted to critique today, the main meaning of critique was expressed neither as a method nor as a theoretical position, rather as its potency to explore “how it may be possible to think”; namely, the way “in which we pose the question of the limits of our most sure ways of knowing, doing and thinking” (Judith Butler & Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 2011) is what constitutes a sense of critique, what makes it workable.

The question of how in contemporaneity we can address bodies as potentially liberating spaces for women is a matter of urgency precisely under this ultimate condition from which the need for critique emerges. I will start my reflections from this very specific angle. As my entry of re-visioning of these spaces I have decided to use the concept-metaphors that mark the body itself, namely the female body as a key signifier for the specific gender location and issue of positionality, but above all as that which opens up the multiplicity of arrangements through which a set of various practices, epistemic structures and cultural signifying systems occur and contest within geo-mapping, challenging the politicality of space to the most extent.

The three metaphors I am dealing with, indicated in the very title of this paper, articulate not only the subject-formation of woman in its spatial settings and spatialization as an active process, but also mark and reflect different power regimes that place woman and space in various intrinsic,

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contesting and negotiatory relations. They also present “the global” which is, according to Henriette Moore, the concept-metaphor itself as “a space of theoretical abstraction and processes, experiences and connections in the world” (Moore 71) whose main function is to maintain a productive tension between universal claims and specific historical contexts. The first questions that appear immediately are not only what are the claims that define “the global”, but what is universal about them when we put bodies in the focus of exploration.

Before I go deeper into the analysis, I would like to point out two things: first, although it seems as almost a general feminist reminder, the issue here is that, unlike male space that is phenomenological by its “phallo-onto-logical” status, female space is a bodily one, as we know the entire binary dichotomy was created and relies on it; and second, connected with the very concept of spatialization, the problem relies on the textuality of woman as a space or disposable terrain for the masters and whose physical and social extent thus gets put under dominant rule “re-written and re-constituted through conjunctions of social positions and psychic subjectivity” (Rogoff 23).

In her brilliant explanation of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri’s suicide (which, by the way, opens up ambiguous insights of analysis) where sati, grounded on “general” Hindu law along with a regulative psychobiography, historically inscribed in the subject formation of woman function together, Gayatri Ch. Spivak invented “womanspace” (Spivak 277, 306-308) as its juncture, as an entity, as an embedded subjugated whole that created a basis for repetition, naturalisation and exposure of both cultural and sexual patterns by the same master. Here master refers to the observance of the Hindu patriarchal tradition by which the suicide sacrifice through the woman’s body emerged as the only social-text of sati (Spivak 307), to the same extent as Bhubaneswari Bhaduri’s attempt to use her body functioned as the only possibility to speak out, to get a voice, to be a text of her own.

On the other side, Irit Rogoff insists more on the process of geographical spatialization, namely on the “multi-inhabitation of spaces” that take place, as she says, “through bodies, social relations and psychic dynamics” (Rogoff 23).

Aside from the line of argumentation focused on the body/mind dualism significant for the constitution of female subjectivity that Elisabeth Grosz (1994) does in a very distinctive philosophical way, or how the inscription and crossroads of various messages into the textuality of

women's bodies goes along with a critical reading of representational practices (including images of essentialised "others" or phantasmatic femininity or "oriental" taste in traditional female poses/gestures, for example), I would rather shift the question in a different direction, looking at geography and space as modes of feminist quest in order to see and articulate the body's situatedness within. Namely, instead of Irit Rogoff's theoretical dilemma of whether we can read bodies as being 'geographically' marked (Rogoff 144), I would argue that contemporary reality elicits a response on another level, that of gendered geography and gendered space reverting, through the creation of a surplus value for the global male masters, to the meaning of omnipotency of the body itself. In pure economic terms this actually means its complete exploitation and depletion with the purpose of providing a surplus value, and the body in both real and imaginative formats/shapes appears as an extension of a global cover for neoliberal economic ordering. A surplus value is, as Marina Gržinić emphasizes "at the core of capital and it is in correlation with surplus enjoyment (with more and more forms of lives, products, identities etc.)" (Gržinić 337) directly connected to the "contemporary institution of masculinity" (Ibid 334).

Therefore, I will focus on the ways in which women's bodies are used, or better, misused to design and remap the new capitalist machinery nowadays, both transnationally and globally, and through which practices and discursive imaginaries, and in that sense how they become particular zones of crossing.

In my view, nothing better than "geobodies", a concept-metaphor explored by feminist theorist and activist Pamella Allara (Allara 350-359) and actually proposed by Swiss visual artist Ursula Biemann, signifies the mobile situatedness of body affair at present, body trouble and body labourscape. Furthermore, I use this metaphor intentionally, namely for indicating the other bodies' "circulations" that signify women's roles in serving other "universal" claims (sexual, phantasmatic, traditional etc.) and where other systems (from hypocritical moral 'economies' based on kinship and need for survival to racial regimes) are engaged for valuing and disvaluing women's bodies (Ong 158-161).

In the text that follows I will briefly touch on some of the paradigmatic ways in which women fit the geobodies trajectory.

Geobodies: scene one

Immigrant Women Workers at the Border

When Ursula Biemann in her video essay project Performing the Border (Biemann 133-144) explored the spaces provided by the unrestricted movement of capital and labour power within neoliberal capitalism, she primarily spoke about the feminization of labour in Ciudad Juarez on the Mexico/US border. By exploring the relationality between specific material conditions of women's labour and global capitalist economy, she came to the notion of "geobodies" as peculiar kinds of mobile factories that rely on the exploiting regime of women's bodies that serve capital there, especially concentrated on the border and around the border. In the vulgar world of capitalism, these spaces are often called Free Trade Zones where, 'cynically', the flow of capital is very much linked to police managing, controlling, forcing, haunting human beings or various ways of dispossessing (identity, dignity, past, housing and of course, future) (Allara 352-354). At the same time, she showed how the bodies become borders themselves.

However, this geobodies trajectory operates very efficiently in various countries, increasingly mapping spaces for bare survival both for female migrants or local 'immobile'/subaltern women based on providing a bias that enhances cheap and overexploited labour and enforces work under slave-like and subhuman conditions, exploitation and over-subjugation. What is at issue here is the "concept of the multiplication of labor" (Mezzadra, Neilson 2008) because the new division of labour on a global scale "involved the shift of material production from developed to less developed nations with an enhanced role from the multinational corporation and effects of deindustrialization and dependency" (Ibid 2008) precisely through intensifying and exhausting all sites of labour as well as creating unexpected working conditions through a constant mutation in rules and arrangements.

Migrant women workers from these 'marked' states or regions have very often lived under border conditions and at the border of living bodies whose neo-slavery position emerges out of invasive neoliberal strategies that often intersect with "racialized nationalism and disjunctive morale economies based on kinship and ethnicity" (Ong 160). Therefore, "biopolitical otherness" is, – a

term used by Aihwa Ong (161-172) to show the quashing of bodily integrity, precisely on them, the poor female migrants in Southeast Asia, and of relations. In other words, the term contains the implications of all these moments in their "otherness status", from noncitizens to nonbelongings.

One of the direct implications, as Ursula Biemann (4) pregnantly states is that the female worker "gets 'technologized' by a post-human terminology that fragments and dehumanizes her body and turns it into a disposable, exchangeable, and marketable component". Of course, within this new super-capitalistic global economy, women are not the only disposable bodies; they are, however, the most exposed bodies along with the bodies of black, brown or immigrant workers, or, ever increasingly, children from the South, from the 'disposable', poor worlds.

Geobodies: scene two

Trafficking in Women – International

Women move or, more precisely, are being moved in various directions legally but more often illegally and less visibly, operated by the transnational criminal backstage, in order to serve a phallo-liberal capital or capitalistic libidal economy on a wide(r) scale. The "porno-tropics of the European imagination", as Anne McClintock (McClintock 23-24) posited once, extends its view nowadays by grasping new "discovering" territories from the closer "East" (Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Kosova, Bulgaria, Croatia, Eastern Europe). This kind of mobility, the entire imaginary of women's bodies that was up until recently carefully concentrated around Third World Women from the very Far East as its distinctive region, turns to be reposited in a different way – more precisely, to a new scape of sexual commodification, open to be consumed after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It varies from sex tourism to forced prostitution with different rules where alterity as an instrument of pleasure (the exotic, the erotic, the dark etc.) has being replaced by new codes of commercially utilised fantasies. The question of what was 'hidden' behind the communist veil was quickly 'translated' in a huge business aided by the rise of organized crime where close proximity to Western Europe and porous borders made it cheaper and easier.

The global sex trade, especially through human trafficking as the most dramatic signifier, is a primary example that creates and comprises large fuzzy areas "in between" transactions by using,

if can use the trendy word from the capitalist world, the “economy of female sexuality”. Women in trafficking actually cover the very meaning of modern slavery within this arrangement.

When we come to the problem of sexualized bodies through trafficking, sexualisation is not only, as Irit Rogoff clearly states, “pushed to the limits of representational realism” (145), but to the realism of the Real. What does it mean? First of all, it creates arguments on another level. While the strategy of the almost ‘normalised’ tourist industry organized around so-called exotic destinations in which sexuality, although present all around as a consumption, is not openly exposed as a “sale” but as hidden and manipulated entertainment through projected and excitable fantasies, another issue is in question here. On the one hand, these “fantasies” are crystallized in the interplay between the inclusion and exclusion of the former communist/socialist countries into the European Union framework (Andrijašević 155-175); on the other hand the trafficking of women has become an aggressive transnational capital strategy and source of massive income fitting a rapidly changing global market. It creates not only “essential statelessness” (Kerber 104) but vulnerability of women’s lives to the most extreme, that is, from dispossession of identities to high levels of abuse and facing death.

Geobodies: scene three

Internet, Desires and Profit

Women are also part of the internet market that capitalizes on a vulnerable set of motivations including effects of long-term unemployment and poverty, offering a special type of “human” market economy advertising women available for correspondence, friendship or marriage, and through this clearly showing how emotional and sexual relations are being commercialized within a larger power framework based on economic imbalances, precarity and penetration of capital into a economy of desires and hopes for a better future. For example, in the late 1990s, women from former East Germany, the former Soviet Union, Asia and Latin America made their appearance in cyberspace via the web address: getmarriednow.com that functioned as a very selective “business class” type of site offering women models with university degrees, and announcing the forthcoming videos of a few thousand women from the former Second World and from Third World countries.

The intention of this growing business flirts with the well-known phantasms and cultural constructions connected with femininity and exoticism, and is accompanied by the available educational status of women of women as an additional value for contemporary man. This is clearly illustrated by the following welcoming note from the home page of this internet domain: “Our goal is to offer you a genuine opportunity to meet the woman of your dreams. We promise it. These ladies are sincere, educated, sensual, kind... and waiting to meet you.”

Due to technological opportunities, there are more and more websites providing this type of content incorporating aspects of the more sophisticated imaginary that women’s lives replace and re-direct to a net of uncertain types of sexual (hetero-/homo-) arrangements. Female bodyscapes via the internet business and its filtration process thus become a new source for transnational capital-centric and consumer-centric management with quite unpredictable consequences for women.

However, colonial perceptions of “othered women”, namely, of female bodies of the “othered territories”, literally embedded in the creation of this peculiar virtual space of cross-cultural desire, have been present the entire time regardless of the various moments of camouflage. Because, it is precisely this space, exposing women in various ways of waiting to be ‘chosen’ or voyeuristically, to be ‘discovered’ as some kind of mobile waiting-room/place that ironically mirrors their ‘exotic’ locations as well as fantasies surrounding the female figure of the other (Huggan 147).

Geobodies: How to resist?

All of these illustrations constitute an objectification of a moment in reality where the “curious eye” is neutralised or contaminated by “performative” normality and all the nuances of located difference become grey and pale through the intensification of the image of capital as global “normality”, or even worse, necessity. Space, sexual and racial as it is, is also “always constituted out of circulating capital” (Rogoff 35) as bodies themselves become a significant means of global capitalist machinery, being disposable at every moment for its circulation and its extension, for its utilitarian use.

In her artistic work “Looking for a Husband with EU passport” (2000-2002), Tanja Ostojić, an outstanding Serbian artist, expressed this mobility in a quite provocative and straightforward manner.

“Bodies move through various spheres/passing through transnational spaces/shopping for another body/that represents desire... bodies turn to images/bodies turn to words/bodies turn to codes... she is beautiful and feminine/she is loving and traditional/she is humble and devoted... she is the copy of the First World’s past,” was one of the more general comments to this project given by Ursula Biemann in “Writing Desire”. But if we link them with her very distinctive reminder: “Only bodies that allow themselves to be marked, to be exchanged, to be turned into a commodity, and to be recycled will be granted the entry visa that allows certain mobility in the transnational space”, a clarity of their complex interweaving appears. Two points here are of significance for analysis and both matter: an allusion that only bodies which are the copies of the “First World’s past” play a role in this mobile transaction as well as the author’s observation with regards to a ‘hidden’ moment of disposability and that is: the admissibility to be marked, and by this code, to circulate within the transnational space.

Flirting precisely with this moment (being a woman from an Eastern, non-Schengen zone), Tanja Ostojić took an active role in her project: advertising her shaved, naked body on the internet in order to find a potential husband with a EU passport as a possibility to ‘legally’ move to Western Europe. On the one hand, her exposing nakedness is “free of any conventional erotic challenge” (Gade 206), on the other hand, as Rune Gade stated, “the shaved sex connotes porn aesthetics, but mixed with the concentration camp connotations of the shaved head, it produces unalloyed doubt and uncertainty about the message of the image” (Ibid 206). Opening her self-portrait to various meanings (political, economic, national, private, aesthetic), the artist dismantled a message of sexual transaction and addressed gender and capital as the most dramatic bonding of the “Real” nowadays.

Another point that is also important for Ostojić’s work and that she explored in Crossing Border Series (2000-2005), and which deserves more attention is the issue of border.

In this mobile economic 'procedure' of women's bodies, border matters. Any kind of border. There is the US/Mexican Border, the Albanian/Kosovo border, more and more sets of West/East borders, visible and sheltered from sight. They are emerging to fulfil the "Life is Profit" syntagm – key for "the newly appearing model of a post-national world of corporate governance, where politics and economy co-function as a unity, and labour is both feminised and sexualised" (Allara 353).

In her Performing the Borders video installation and essay that was based on exploring social practices and regulatory discourses through which a border, namely the Mexico/US border, is produced, Ursula Biemann argued that the sexual and industrial labour markets are closely related within this economic order, turning the border not only into a gendered but also a highly sexualized terrain; therefore, low wages force many women to seek supplementary income from prostitution on weekends and transnational companies reap benefits by getting cheap labour and at the same time making women dependent on commodifying their bodies as additional "work". According to her standpoint, prostitution is not just part of the tax-free consumer binge that is taking place at the border; it is a structural part of global capitalism whereby the sexuality of the female worker is addressed as a potential commodity. What she found quite problematic is the on-going violent clash between bodies, sexuality, and technology in the border zone that makes the situation even worse, by turning into various forms of compulsive violence.

In short, through the usage of bodies within geopolitical, geoeconomic and virtual space which function out of recycling the bodyscapes, many questions appear such as: Which types of humanist questions could we ask by looking at these bodies, by facing these bodies, by exploring these bodies? Which types of questions are even left to us? In addition, what constitutes us as spectators, global walkers, performers or potential agencies, or what constitutes us as possible human subjects? And going further, how can we articulate the division between the sexual and the economic within this mobile zone of exploitation and precarity, as well as between concepts of masculinity and femininity under these conditions and with which certainty? How to follow the circulation of women's bodies? Or, how to locate and fight against this kind of human damage? Many questions and dilemmas need to be answered, posed, addressed.

Instead of a conclusion, I will only trace some proposals articulated by contemporary feminists, both theorists and artists, in order to confront and subvert the matrix of global capitalist spatiality.

Proposals are conceptualised either as counter-sites of gendered exploitation of labour through a radical critique toward the constitutive violence of the dominant global economy, its underlying theories, concepts and norms, or as creating zones of resistance through the process of shifting positions, and with that, creating potentials for new framework(s) or critical engagement. Pamela Allara, for example, insists on critical activism that includes redefining the terms as well as the conditions under which women's bodies are directed by the flow of global capital (Allara 357), while Gloria Anzaldúa, Chandra Talpade Mohanty or Trinh T. Minh-ha, each in her own way, contributed to the space of transgressive acting.

In her influential book Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa, thanks to the multiple worlds she inhabited and to their ambiguities namely because of her gender, sexuality, class, and spiritual beliefs, created a mestiza as a "zone", as a "borderland", as a new possibility to step out from the cultures and oppressive traditions that hold us locked in within dualistic thinking (individual/collective, male/female, human/race, among others) and by them provide various modes of manipulations. She shows precisely how the complexity of border identifications at the crossroads enables this powerful shift toward a "zone" as one that was suspended between various identities, a "zone" which provided a resistance through the process of disidentification, just as the transgression of the border itself opens a space between, a space where 'mestiza consciousness' develops as a transformative inventory of one's own self through struggle, taking risks and radical strategies. In that sense it creates liberating spaces in the process of human acting. On the other side, Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her essay "Women Workers and the Politics of Solidarity" (Mohanty 139-168) insisted on enlarging the spaces of feminist communities that are post-national, trans-local and multi-positioned in the struggle for social justice work across the existing lines of global division of capitalist economy, that perpetuates geobodies trajectory. For a moment, a human zone is in exposure and a question of transforming the real "modes of existence" through fighting the capitalistic globality that functions through and via women bodies, goes with the possibility of creating women's space(s).

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