

JOURNAL OF RESISTANCE STUDIES

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EDITORIAL:

Feminized Resistances¹

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Introduction

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her movement (Cixous, 1976: 875).

Hélène Cixous' emblematic call to write ourselves into the world and political being, is a call which wraps itself softly around our fingers and resolutely holds our hearts as we write this introduction. It is a call that speaks to the experiences of trauma, silencing, and exile of our own, and of which our authors speak. Yet, our special issue renders visible how new political languages, logics, and literacies are emerging from those places and subjects who have been rendered mute, monstrous, and malignant by patriarchal capitalist-coloniality. We invite you to take our hands and cast off the masks that have inhibited sight, feeling, and knowing-being. We invite you to journey with us into this borderland's

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encounter, where a politics enfolded that is being gently and powerfully crafted in the worlds and words of feminized resistances can be found. We hope that our collection of embodied texts will embolden (y)our loving weaving of this feminized politics otherwise.

What is to be done?

As the fissures in the violent logics of contemporary patriarchal capitalist-coloniality become ever more visible and visceral, those of us committed to co-constructing an *other* politics beyond these deathly logics of being and knowing, are faced with the urgent and ever present question: “What is to be done?”. In this special issue of the *Journal of Resistance Studies* we seek to provide a tentative and tender mapping of feminized resistances and subjectivities to support our navigation of these uncertain and transitional times. We believe that engagement with such resistances visibilizes practices of thought and action through and with which to nurture the conditions of possibility for emergent and imminent forms of creating, living, and loving otherwise.

Dominant representations of politics and resistance tend to reproduce the racialized and feminized subaltern subject as the absent other, of populist unreason, conservative particularity, victims without voice, and/or at best subjects of a concrete, identity-based politics that are unable to challenge macro-levels of power. Our issue speaks back to such violent misrepresentations and elisions by centering the praxis and voices of these subjects of, and from, the margins. We demonstrate how racialized subaltern women and communities are in fact at the forefront of the creation of a multiplicity of female political subjectivities and a marked feminization of resistance (Mohanty, 2003; Motta, 2013).

Women’s political engagement in contemporary struggles and movements is varied and complex. Some fight against neoliberal development projects that displace thousands of poor people. Whilst others contest historic logics of coloniality that imbricate smoothly with contemporary neoliberal logics to reproduce the pathologization of raced and feminized communities that results in, among other things, increasing rates of incarceration and forced child removal. Some concentrate particularly on queering politics in their struggle against patriarchal capitalist-coloniality, sexism, and heteronormativity. Additionally,

women's role in many popular movements has intensified, with shifts in the political towards a micro-political subversion and creation of, and in, the everyday. These women in movement enact and embody a communing which nurtures horizontal forms of political power and disalienated subjectivities, as well as collective and collaborative forms of social reproduction.

Such feminized subjectivities, politics, and resistance, if recognized at all, are generally conceptualized from perspectives that draw strongly on masculinist and Euro-centric concepts, approaches, and practices of knowing (Spivak, 1988; Lugones, 2010; Motta, 2013, 2016). What is elided and denied in many analyses is the ways in which racialized subaltern women who simultaneously face multiple oppressions can also create and experiment with new political subjectivities, re-imagine emancipatory politics, and produce and embody multiple grounds of epistemological difference and becoming. Viewed from this perspective, the emergence of female political subjectivities and the feminization of resistance raise fundamental epistemological and political questions. There is thus an urgent “need to recognize a feminization of resistance that is historically distinctive”, and which has the potential to challenge White and “masculinist conceptualizations of political and social transformation” (Motta, 2013: 35).

It is our explicit aim to address and explore these themes from a variety of epistemological perspectives in order to enmesh and decolonize representation, and to contribute to a queering of the very boundaries which have shaped disciplinarity in White masculinist alienating forms of knowing-being which work to produce the feminized and racialized subaltern subject as absent of rationality and subjectivity.

In our call for papers we invited texts with critical reflections, evaluations, theoretical developments, and empirical analyses, encouraging a critical discussion on the forms, conditions, possibilities, as well as problematics of feminized resistances and political subjectivities. We articulated our interest especially in critical understandings of feminized resistance strategies, subjectivities, epistemologies, discourses, tactics, effects, causes, contexts, and experiences. In line with the journal's main aim, we set out to advance an understanding of how feminized resistances and emancipatory practices might subvert and dislocate repression, injustice

and domination of any kind, as well as how such resistance might nurture autonomous subjectivity, alternative communities, as well as oppositional ways of thinking, being, doing, and loving.

Our call for papers received 35 abstracts. We selected the eight most promising papers for potential inclusion in this special issue, which ultimately contains five articles. In our editorial we work pedagogically to map, systematize, and strategize with their theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. Our systematization does not seek to re-enclose the epistemological diversity of enfolded political knowing-being that our contributors demonstrate into a Monological and closed tome of reified political directives or theoretical Truths. Rather, we hope to maintain a tension between the act of representing these feminized resistances and the art of keeping open the possibilities they gift to us in our thinking and being political otherwise.

We start by addressing the articles' main contributions to the field of resistance studies as we see it, and then move on to four key innovative themes in feminized resistances that emerge from the pieces: storytelling as onto-epistemological becomings; reading motherhood politically; feminine semiotics and the feminine divine; and liminality and queering borderlands. We then move to strategies and thinking-being ways forward that emerge from our collective voice: storytelling, storytellers and critical intimacy; onto-epistemological listening; and an ethics of care and care-fullness. We consider as part of this discussion the role and positionality of the researcher together with important methodological and ethical issues in engaging in feminized resistance in feminized ways.

Feminizing Resistance Studies

In her article "Telling Stories of Resistance and Ruination: Women Seeking Asylum", Kate Smith examines the relationship between hegemonic narratives about people seeking asylum and women asylum seekers' own stories in Britain. She argues for "new and different narratives which accommodate some of the complexities and contradictions of women's lives and open up the possibilities for women to tell their own diverse and different stories". Her analysis demonstrates that while some women who are seeking asylum "make sense of their lives and tell their stories in

relation to dominant narratives”, not all stories fit into these frameworks, and are thus “at risk of being overlooked, silenced, and unrecognized”. Yet, when these women gain the possibility to produce their own stories, they can challenge “problematic identities and dehumanizing narratives” while creating “new and different narratives” through which it becomes possible to “accommodate some of the complexities and contradictions” they are experiencing in their lives.

Smith’s analysis feminizes resistance studies by emphasizing the importance of narrative forms of resistance which not only produce new representations of otherwise invisibilized and infantilized raced and feminized subaltern subjects, but which also breathe into being the possibilities of survival, resilience, and enfolded hope. Importantly, her analysis disrupts the binary often found in resistance studies which either focuses on the political event as the epitome of resistance, or an unproblematic everyday form of resistance. Whilst Smith focuses our attention on everyday micro-practices of resistance and active agency, she demonstrates how these possibilities are constructed through practices of meaning-making in which contradictory fragments of good sense are put to work in the slow and careful practice of telling our stories.

Liz Mason-Deese’s article “Unemployed Workers’ Movements and the Territory of Social Reproduction” analyzes the role of women in the unemployed workers’ movements in Buenos Aires, Argentina, focusing on the ways on which they have politicized the issue of social reproduction by organizing around issues such as hunger, healthcare, housing, and education, as well as creating alternative economic practices and other autonomous forms of social reproduction. Her analysis shows how women’s key role in organizing around reproduction “implies a different sense of *the political*, which decenters the spaces and institutions of the state in order to privilege *territorial organizing* in the spaces of everyday life”. In addressing the politicization of social reproduction, Mason-Deese’s article contributes to the debate on feminized resistances in a way which “goes beyond a quantitative increase in women’s participation and leadership in social movements or the increasing visibility of women’s issues to imply a qualitative difference in how resistance takes shape”. The feminization of resistance, as she points out, “entails challenging the traditional divisions between the public and private spheres,

politicizing the ‘personal’, and shifting emphasis onto bodies and the everyday activities of social reproduction” – be it in the context of families, trade unions, political parties, state institutions, or within social movements where “certain forms of care work are undervalued and assumed to be women’s responsibility, while men engage in what is typically considered ‘political’ work: decision-making, public actions, speaking”.

Mason-Deese’s contribution arguably feminizes resistance studies by demonstrating how spaces that have been traditionally considered private or women’s space are actually key sites of political struggle and co-creation. This allows, as she argues, “for rethinking not only what counts as labor but what labor is valuable and necessary work”. It is exactly in this way that “women continue to lead the resistance to processes of neoliberalism and the precaritization wrought by this crisis of reproduction, through the creation of autonomous forms of social reproduction and the promotion of an ethics of care that challenges the basic assumptions of capitalist development”. Her contribution suggests the development of analytic lenses that creates potential for subverting masculinist forms of resistance which devalues and invisibilizes the politics of social reproduction and the everyday. It also suggests developing methodologies of critical intimacy with women and communities in struggle as opposed to traditional methodologies which have a strong tendency to value critical distance and reinscribe divisions of labor between thinker and doer, masculinized white mind and feminized, racialized body (Motta, 2011; Lugones, 2010).

In her article “Decolonizing Australia’s Body Politics: Contesting the Coloniality of Violence of Child Removal”, Sara C. Motta develops “a critique of the continual historic and contemporary use of child removal to systematically pathologize and criminalize Black, Indigenous, and poor-white motherhood”. Through her decolonizing feminist re-reading of contemporary child removal in Australia, she demonstrates “how the technologies and rationalities put to work as part of the reproduction of the modern state, wound the body politic in ways that disarticulate the conditions of possibility of the political subjectivity of the subaltern”. Moreover, Motta illustrates “active processes of subjectivity of racialized subaltern mothers and families, and their allies offer emergent possibilities for a decolonizing politics which seeks not rec-

ognition within the ‘state’ of things as they are but a radical disruption of the terms of the conversation as they have and continue to structure Australia’s state and polity”.

From the perspective of resistance studies, the main contribution of Motta’s article is the way in which her praxical analysis and reflection extends our understanding of the feminization of resistance “by bringing to the centre of our analytic and political attention the decolonizing epistemological and methodological aspects of this reinvention of emancipatory politics”. Importantly, this means “beginning from the onto-epistemological politics of subaltern racialized women through embracing the conflicting, tension-ridden experiences of being at once subjugated as a racialized subaltern non-subject *and* resisting this through active processes of subjectivity”. In this way, it goes “beyond both the representational invisibility of the racialized women and also the racialized subaltern woman as victim detailed above, to a perspective of feminism in decolonizing praxis”. As this is necessarily “a praxical task”, it “implies a stepping inwards to the contours of everyday life and the embodied experience of the lived contradictions between the ‘fiction’ and realities of capitalist (self) representation”. Similarly to Smith and Mason-Deese, this suggests a methodological reorientation to an epistemological co-creation of meaning for transformation, and subverts patriarchal capitalist-colonial forms of theory-making and practices of critique. Not only does this challenge the epistemic privilege of the thinker-knower but it also argues for practices of unlearning and decolonizing of that very subjectivity (to be enfleshed later).

Aja Marneweck’s article “Sexual and Spiritual R-Evolution through Animism: The Feminine Semiotics of Puppetry” explores resistant representational strategies of the feminine through analysis of animism-based creative practices in South Africa. She focuses on puppetry, which she considers “a sentient tool that simultaneously exposes the constructs of being whilst engaging in what could be described as a performative alchemy of imagination and form”. In analyzing how women’s puppetry pushes “the margins of complex political and sexual discourse as the language of the feminine body expressed in her multiplicitous identities and sexualities of resistance”, Marneweck illustrates how these artistic and creative practices based on animism “proffer strategies for expansive

creative distillations that provide new trajectories for feminine resistance and empowerment”. According to her, puppetry can serve as a “feminizing, de-colonizing form of artistic resistance” and “evoke critical and contentious languages of a co-constructive femininity in strategies of resistance today”.

From the perspective of resistance studies, the way in which she interprets feminine puppetry as “an artistic strategy of spiritual and sexual resistance to western patriarchal oppression” is intriguing. With a reference to a “feminized strategy for r-evolutionary creative practices”, she argues that “it is the radical feminine at the heart of puppetry that offers so many of the discursive strategies for resistance that emerge in its contemporary performance applications”. Her contribution enacts a return to the embodied, similar to the other contributions; however, this return to the embodied enacts in form and content a return of the world to the word, of the body to the text, and of the heart/womb to thought. This, in effect, helps in building an infrastructure of feminized resistances and becomings which present an intimate and essential challenge to traditions of critique and resistance studies embedded in logics of patriarchal capitalist-coloniality.

The last article of our special issue, “Queering Resistance, Queering Research: In Search of a Queer Decolonial Feminist Understanding of Adivasi Indigeneity” takes us to Kerala, India, the context in which Padini Nirmal mobilizes a queer decolonial feminist framework and utilizes *queering* to critically examine and analyze contemporary indigeneity as well as indigenous resistance. She does this by analyzing, firstly, the coloniality of development and its material effects on Adivasi lands and consequent land struggles, and secondly, by analyzing gender and sexuality in the same context. Nirmal illustrates how *queering* discloses “the latent structural complexities of Adivasi indigeneity by drawing causal links between systematic processes of land loss and land alienation, material livelihood, and structural changes in various domains, including gender, sexuality, spirituality and health”. Critically analyzing the state’s various policies through a decolonial feminist perspective, she shows how the objectives of different state policies are often contradictory with each other and can be harmful from the perspective of the Adivasis, for example, as development policies create “a state of dependence

rather than empowerment” and conservation policies support “industrial growth rather than socio-ecological preservation”.

Nirmal’s article addresses resistance from a variety of perspectives and on multiple levels. One of her most interesting arguments is that “emergent and existing modalities of Adivasi resistance” can be considered “epistemological and ontological acts of decolonial resistance against the combined coloniality of capitalism, development and modernity on their ancestral lands”. She illustrates how *queering* can be used productively in helping to recognize indigenous agency and resistance while also developing our understanding of “research *as* resistance”, a queer process that destabilizes, rethinks, and questions normative operations of power. It also advances the general understanding of resistance in various ways, for example, by showing that

the active, continuing presence of the Adivasi within the modern nation state to be an act of decolonial resistance... Even when Adivasis do not engage in protests and movement actions, they continue to live in living worlds of their own ontological, epistemological, and material making. This continued presence and prevalence of Adivasi land ontologies, and the living worlds that their ontologies enact and sustain despite years of colonial intervention, indicates presence to be a modality of resistance in general, and a form of embodied resistance in particular.

As Nirmal points out, these kinds of interpretations can potentially broaden our understanding of resistance as “conjoined component of decoloniality where that which is decolonial, is already in resistance”. *Queering*, in other words, works to complicate the concept of resistance by connecting it to acts of refusal, denial, and non-engagement, and by defining ontological difference as a form of decolonial engagement and act of resistance. In this way, her work centers the onto-epistemological multiple practices of being and relating that disrupt and escape attempts to analyze and engage with subaltern resistances using Monological onto-epistemological frameworks embedded in patriarchal coloniality.

The Gifts of Feminized Resistances

Below we map and systematize four gifts emerging from our palimpsest of feminized resistances – gifts that dominant framings of resistance and politics have written over. These gifts move us into uncharted territory of unknown possibilities. Yet, we feel they offer alchemical insights into how we might come to collectively develop multiple, heartfelt, and hope-filled answers to the question, “What is to be done?”.

Storytelling as Onto-Epistemological Becomings

What might be considered an epistemology of becoming underpinning the contributions to the special issue, centers its modes of be-ing around storytelling. Here, female subjects develop practices that seek to uproot the dominant and violent narratives that are told about *them* and which often embed themselves in their stories of self. Stories are, thus, not simply told about us but rather, as Kate Smith in her article explains, “our lives... are produced through, and at times constrained by, our own stories and the storytelling of others”. For women seeking asylum are responsabilized, as Smith continues, to “tell their stories in relation to dominant narratives”. Such demands to speak through and with dominant narratives also manifests in the “helping” professions for whom, as Smith continues, those women asylum seekers who do not reproduce a victim story become often unrecognized and are thus silenced, precluding recognition and engagement with their stories of agency and resistance.

These dominant stories often tear us and our families into pieces, as Sara C. Motta demonstrates in the case of forced child removal in Australia. Such stories, in this case, reproduce historic violent practices of state intervention onto the body of the racialized and feminized in the name of “civilization” and “saving”. In the contemporary period, they are put to work to produce raced and feminized subjects as “hate” figures. They aim to divide the popular body politic against itself and make women dance to a tune that is not theirs, distorting their realities and possibilities in an attempt at suffocation under layers of disembodied concepts, materialized through the everyday violent tentacles of state-capitalist power.

In contrast, as our contributors demonstrate, the storytelling of feminized resistances constitutes a re-telling that re-worlds and re-roots otherwise negated feminized and racialized subjects. It enflashes an existential coming into (collective) being which reclaims and re-members the arts of speaking-listening. Through this, seeds of possibility of our becoming are planted as we weave the actualities of be-ing otherwise in the world. This weaving, as Aja Marneweck demonstrates, connects, and is of, the sacred and the profane, of the everyday sweat and blood and breath, with the cosmic utterings of a feminine semiotic. This epistemological practice of relationality and connection develops a voice that embodies fragility as its strength and cannot be contained by the literacy of the phenomenology of Patriarchal Whiteness and the logics and rationalities of Coloniality. Rather, it is here that our serpent's tongues begin to speak through whispers of worlds and desires that beautify the grey-ness of disconnection and despair. It is here that a prefigurative transformation is actualized in which the pain body of internalized shame and disbelief becomes an embodied speaking back, at times beyond patriarchal capitalist-coloniality.

The voices and the stories told are of a subject that is multiple. This subject moves against and beyond the prophetic “from on high, thus speaks the Truth” form of storytelling so dominant in masculinist forms of emancipatory left critique (for further reflection see West, 1989; Motta, 2016). Such masculinist traditions of critique are characterized by an affectivity of ruptures, roughness, and a fierceness which re-articulates a terrain of the Monological, speaking over our embodied witnessing, and negating our grief and joy as sites of philosophical possibility. Feminized critique, as our contributors demonstrate, instead honors, and speaks from, the embodied experiences of subjugation *and* resistances, weaving as Lugones describes “an incarnated peopled memory”.

These practices push beyond the restrictive confines of critique which reify forms of resistance valuable and visible to an external audience and instead, as Smith discusses, “acknowledge personal or intimate activities, as well as practices and behaviors of resistance in response to a subtle and complex set of different circumstances and situations”. These “other” histories form the ground for a re-rooting of subjects negated by the dominant script of the political. Such re-rooting subverts

the paradoxical gaze that marks us as invisible as subjects and yet hyper-visible as objects of intervention, through the co-creation of a visibility of our own. This feeling-speaking visibility does not seek to speak in the master's language, but rather orientates itself towards a re-creation of the very terms, logics, and rationalities of the political, including the revolutionary/radical political.

Reading Motherhood Politically

Our contributors demonstrate how the raced body of the subaltern mother becomes a legitimate site of state interventions which attempt to reproduce the non-subjectivity of these women and their families. As Motta demonstrates, neoliberal logics and rationalities of individualization of social ills and raced pathologization of the poor imbricate smoothly with the historic violent rationalities and logics of coloniality. Here Black and Indigenous mothers, and increasingly poor white mothers, become positioned as outside and against citizenship, a threat to civility and their children, and thus subject to forced child removal or in the case of women seeking asylum, as Smith demonstrates, represented as bad mothers and/or bogus asylum seekers. Black and Indigenous motherhood becomes positioned as a stain on the body politic, in need of cleansing and removal. Additionally, as Mason-Deese demonstrates in the case of Argentina, this combined with increasing labor precarity and removal of public services often place mothers in the paradoxical position of both being blamed for their poverty and shouldered with the burden of their families' survival. The combination of these disciplinary interventions, social abandonment, and (mis)representations reproduce historic wounding and inflict new layers of wounding across and upon the body politic in an attempt to disarticulate the conditions of political voice and subjectivity of the subaltern.

However, as the terrain of the political economy of neoliberal violence shifts increasingly to the community, and mothers are often at the heart of their community, they have moved from the margins to the centre of the re-creation of a new politics of the commons and social reproduction. As Liz Mason-Deese quotes,

The men were embarrassed, they didn't want anyone to know they were not working, so they would stay inside all day, many started drinking... Meanwhile, us women had to go on providing for our families, we had to eat, we didn't have time to go about being embarrassed or worrying about our pride... that's why we came together and started organizing. (Interview, November 11, 2011, La Matanza)

From a place of devaluation, individualization, and often despair, mothers become the key organizers, thinkers, and collective nurturers of their communities. Positioned as a stain on civility and empty of thought, history and subjectivity, they collectively subvert this and come into being as political subjects with voice, agency, and dignity. Through their practices they create social relationships that do not produce for capital but for the commons and an *other* politics of well-being. Collective motherhood and forms of mothering such as these enact a politics in, again, and beyond the traditional figure of the mother. Such subversion and recuperation of an otherwise disparaged and negated motherhood, is also enacted in the narratives of mothers seeking asylum in which they foreground their continued care and loving-being as a mother even after being forced to separate from their children. Similarly, mothers who have faced, and are facing child removal, as Motta demonstrates, seek to recuperate and subvert dominant (mis)representations, often internalized, that they are unfit mothers and unable to care by practices of testimony and re-telling in which they identify, and strengthen, their capacity to care, survive, and nurture.

Such processes by necessity open our politics to horizons of other ethics and practices of care, not limited or framed by the privatized heteronormative and colonial rendition of family to the nuclear family unit. Indeed, they expand motherhood to the non-maternal body, and bring value to practices and relationships normally relegated to women's work and yet essential to ensure the reproduction and well-being of our communities. As Mason-Deese describes in relation to unemployed movements in Argentina, this includes

taking care of a children a collective, community responsibility, not the sole responsibility of mothers or other female relatives, and enables

women to be more equal participants in the movement as a whole. On the other hand, by paying members to work in childcare and educational projects, either directly or through government subsidies, the MTD demonstrates the importance it places on these activities. Valuing and compensating this labor thus directly contrasts against its invisibilization and naturalization as women's labor under capitalism, and allows for the work to be shared rather than falling solely to women.

This politics of motherhood also nurtures what is arguably the terrain of a new cosmopolitics, a new enfolded political communion embedded within care; care for self, other, and cosmos. This takes seriously an affectivity of tenderness, attentiveness, connection, and love, and moves beyond and below a disembodied politics of momentary ruptures, cataclysmic events, and great egos. As Mason-Deese describes, "Speaking of care implies a way of engaging differently in reproduction by prioritizing the creation and reproduction of life and healthy social relations over the reproduction of capital". Feminized resistances are, clearly, at the very heart of this politics of care and social reproduction otherwise.

The politics of motherhood thus foregrounds and centralizes the site of the community and practices of social reproduction in this new feminized politics of the commons. Here a politics in, against, and beyond the figure of the hegemonic mother is articulated, one which vindicates the capacity and the dignity of Black and Indigenous motherhood and traditions of mothering, at the same time as it collectivizes mothering to the non-maternal body. By valuing labor that is traditionally individualized, feminized, and invisibilized, it re-thinks and re-shapes the contents, forms, rhythms, and textures of emancipatory politics and resistance. It shifts our attention and bodies to the intimacies of reproducing everyday life against and beyond the politics of capitalist negation and dehumanization *and* masculinist and White forms of the (revolutionary) political.

Feminine Semiotics and Feminine Divine

Now I-woman am going to blow up the Law: an exposing henceforth possible and ineluctable: let it be done, right now (Cisoux, 1976: 887).

As Walter Mignolo explains, in capitalist coloniality the “word is separated from the world” and becomes a disembodied source of Truth and Reason in the world premised upon the epistemological annihilation of the raced other. However, this raced other is also deeply gendered, as a feminized dark body of lack, barbarity, death, and madness that must be tamed and contained. Such epistemological logics and rationalities create a Monological language and onto-epistemological text of a singular world:

given over to ritual, repetition, a secondary attribution of values, speculation and to a logic unsuited to life and its breath... uprooted from its engendering in the present, from its connection to my own and the other’s body (Irigaray, 2016: 123).

A return to the enfleshed feminine as the basis of a feminine semiotic that speaks from this space of abjection and negation, not as an Other to the Self, but as an *other* outside and autonomous, becomes thus a mode of creative becoming in the practices of feminized resistances. Feminized forms of representation are a central thread in such enfleshed coming into being of our-selves otherwise. These necessarily exceed the logics and rationalities of representation of patriarchal capitalist-coloniality.

Here the contribution of Marneweck is paradigmatic of this untameable feminine semiotic of being-knowing-feeling. In its form the piece conjures into being the third space of the inappropriate other (Trinh T. Minh-Hha, 1987), with the word as both representation and expression weaving undulating, wild, untameable, and allegorical texts. In its content, it engages with the feminine semiotic as represented and called into being through the embodied animistic performances of “feminist” puppetry in South Africa. As she describes,

Through the body of the performed puppet, deliberate attention is brought to the inherent multiplicity of being that facilitates life... It is these multiple performing differences that converge in the puppet that render it an inappropriate other, as that which both expresses and confounds construct and being, visually and critically bridging inside and outside, critique and aesthetic, binary and liminality. Puppetry reveals

itself as a sentient tool that simultaneously exposes the constructs of being in the sculpted, created form (morph) and the performing feminine body, whilst engaging in what I can only express as a performative alchemy of presence and embodiment (forces, power, abjection, creation and decay, sentience, emotion).

Language becomes multiple, taking embodied, spiritual, ancestral, cognitive, and aesthetic forms. Language also exceeds representation and calls into being the presence of the third space of the inappropriate other of which Marneweck speaks. In these performances of play, ritual, and imagination, the sacredness of connection to the feminine body, the ancestral knowledges of women and of the body of the earth and cosmos are re-called and re-membered to be present. The creative re-connection to what black feminist Audre Lorde (2000) spoke of as the erotic, is nurtured, and in this the sacred multiple sexed and embodied liminal sexuality at the heart of the feminine semiotic speaks. As Marneweck explains, this enflashed feminization of re-evolutionary resistance “holds open the doors of not just an alternative resistance to the destructive segregations of hegemonic discourse and systems, but of living awareness of the fluidity of boundaries so crucial to revisioning identity, sexuality, self, environment and being in the 21st century”.

Such onto-epistemological politics of the embodied decolonizing other are also touched upon in Nirmal’s contribution, which seeks to develop a queer decolonial feminist reading of Adivasi Indigeneity in Attappady, Kerala. In this decolonial politics of presence, the land is subject and indigeneity is always-already in relation to the land which has spiritual, material, and ultimately ontological value. Monological and reductionist linguistic representations reproduced by the state of/as coloniality thus enact continuing symbolic and material violence upon Adivasi peoples. For instance, state renditions of land as empty and/or object to be commercialized render silent Adivasi complex representations in which, as Nirmal describes citing one of her interviewees, “kaaTu” refers to land for agriculture, while “maNu” refers to all land, territory and living world, “veeTu” refers to home, and “solai” refers to the forest. If land has presence, history, and knowledge, then its rendition as absence reproduces violent logics of silence and silencing.

Land as already always ontological-political has clear resonances and connections with what other activist decolonial scholars such as author Marisol de la Cadena (2010), speaking in relation to Indigenous politics in the Andes, calls a new cosmopolitics which embraces earth-beings as subjects. *Queering*, as Nirmal describes, “is not just about decolonizing relations to land, but also about the decolonization of everything in relation”. This ontological politics or cosmopolitics ruptures the historic hierarchical and violently enforced borders of masculinized White man against and over feminized and racialized nature, that is, the natural upon which the coloniality of liberalism is embedded. Queering feminist decoloniality thus helps to visibilize and resist the Monological and singular politics of knowledge of patriarchal capitalist-coloniality which renders land as object, empty of being-knowing relationality, and thus void of onto-epistemological value.

Resistance and calling into being an *other* way of life as an ultimately Queering Feminine Semiotic seeks not to speak in the terms of White masculinist logics, rationalities, and performances of resistance and critique. For these, as Cisoux describes “[create] the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing”. Rather, the queering feminine semiotic as the feminization of resistance seeks to “inscribe the breath of the whole wo-man”. A complex multilayered, embedded, and embodied co-creative being in the world which embraces all that is exiled, denied, and rendered mute and pathological within masculinist forms of the political become the grounds for our speaking. Such speaking is multiple, excessive, unruly, heretic, and it re-works in multiple and open ways the epistemological grounds of being and becoming in/as/with the world.

Liminality and Queering Borderlands

Motta, Nirmal, and Marneweck all resist and subvert in form and content hierarchical binaries and bordering practices constitutive of patriarchal capitalist-coloniality. In different ways, they speak a politics from the abject or the marginalized others that finds in these places and bodies the possibilities for a queering feminist decolonial politics otherwise. This subverts the re-presentations of the margins and the marginal as epistemologically monstrous and devoid of any capacity as speaking-subject.

It instead seeks to co-create collective practices of meaning-making in which we imminently call into being other worlds and epistemological grounds of becoming.

The first steps in this as practice and representation are, as Nirmal describes, taking “the inversion of the margin and the center” and exposing the violence that brought into being and undergirds the reproduction of this hierarchical binary/border. Like this, we become willing and able to “look Medusa straight on to see her” and as Hélène Cisoux (1976: 884–885) so beautifully describes, what we see is that “she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing”.

This epistemological privileging and political centering of the margins and otherwise disposable or infantilized subject disrupts and dislodges the complex politics of invisibility and hyper-visibility, which all our authors touch upon and which reproduce the onto-epistemological negation of these feminized and racialized subaltern subjects. The imminent co-construction of knowing embodied presence subverts the dehumanizing gaze of coloniality, shining a collective light on the continued biopolitical violence of the rationalities and technologies of contemporary neoliberalized coloniality.

The creation of our own visibility on our own terms not only involves subverting the external gaze between the binary, but also casting a tender look at the ways in which the colonizers’ gaze becomes internalized and creates epistemological and ontological soul wounds (Gill et al., 2012; Duran et al., 2008). As Motta and Smith demonstrate in relation to mothers experiencing forced child removal in Australia and women asylum seekers in Britain respectively, this involves complex and multiple forms of testimony and embodied witnessing, premised upon an ethics of careful attentiveness, deep listening, and active unlearning. As Jasmina Husanović (2015: 26) writes in relation to the politics of trauma, “enacting a modality of witnessing... is an embodied experience which creates anew shattered webs and coordinates of humanity, sociality, and politicality”. It also crafts new feminized literacies of grief, joy, and embodied hope.

Subverting the violence of the gaze of Power, Truth, and Reason does more than speak from and centre the margins and marginality as

site of epistemic possibility. It seeks to disrupt the very binaries between centre and margin, colonizer and colonized, masculine and feminine, self and other. It thus enacts a decolonization in form and content of the categories of subjectification in which we (dis)appear as racialized and feminized (non)subjects. As Motta recounts in relation to the act of witnessing the agentic narrative of a misnamed and shamed mother, a radical relationality can be forged which disrupts the boundary between, and categories of, self and other. In this occurs a mutual learning and unlearning of the wounds of coloniality, and which, as Nirmal discusses in the case of queering feminist decoloniality but equally applicable here, co-creates a “simultaneous construction of epistemological and ontological narratives of the researcher and the research, whereby the researcher’s own world-making merges with those of the research subjects”. These encounters enact alchemical processes of meaning-making in which liminality and plurality of being and becoming are foregrounded. Echoing the sacred practices of the Feminine Semiotics in the animistic puppetry of which Marneweck speaks, this praxis, as Nirmal continues, “is not about border crossing, but about shape shifting borders themselves”.

Our collective contribution in this special issue on Feminized Resistances subverts and challenges much current critical debate that fails to recognize or condemns and is fearful of a politics which begins from the place-based experiences of multiple oppressions. Such critical debate often suggests that such place-based and intimately embodied forms of feminized and racialized politics can only ever do the work of capitalist hegemony and recuperate potentially radical politics into a liberal and individualistic moralism which disarticulates popular revolutionary subjectivities and collectivities.

We speak back, in and through multiple tongues, to this (mis)representation of the possibilities of politics which begin from such experiences through the work of decolonial feminist autonomist praxis emerging from racialized subaltern women across the globe. Centrally this “we” does not seek in form or content to re-enclose political possibilities into a singular and Monological onto-epistemological project. Rather, these praxical methodologies and relational onto-epistemic encounters enmesh the provincialization of the Euro-centric revolutionary subject assumed in extant critique, and demonstrate how its grounds of

being are premised on the denial and dehumanization of the raced and feminized “other”. In this way, we seek to open immanent and embodied possibilities of a multiple liminal pluridiverse subjectivity that is birthing into being both an other feminized politics of resistance and affirmative decolonizing onto-epistemological grounds of becoming (political) otherwise.

Strategies and Ways Forward: The Role and Positionality of Researcher and Methodologies of Feminist Decolonizing

This final part of our editorial moves to strategic considerations specifically in relation to fostering and nurturing the conditions of possibility for the seeding of an enfolded politics and epistemological becoming otherwise. We move through and dialogue with the contributors’ insights, practices, and commitments. We speak from a perspective of scholar-activists living and breathing an “activist life” (Seppälä, forthcoming) in which we seek to co-construct the conditions of our self-liberation with the communities in which we are embedded.

We center the importance of tender and complex forms of both coming to voice amongst and within ourselves and our feminized and racialized communities, as well as the importance of co-creating tender and complex forms of solidarity between different groups of women in engaging in a broader yet multiple project of constructing decolonial forms of feminist solidarity (Mohanty, 2003; see also Seppälä, 2016a, 2016b). This kind of feminist praxis is based on the idea that through the creation of “a plurality of forms of knowing” and transnational as well as local alliances and solidarities, it is possible to destabilize “epistemological politics of patriarchal capitalist coloniality”, to challenge “the dramatic effects of neoliberal capitalism on the lives of women” (Motta, 2013: 38), and to co-create the conditions of possibility for a new pluridiverse emancipatory politics for our times.

Storytelling, Storytellers, and Critical Intimacies

All the authors in this special issue share an embodied and existential embrace of, and commitment to, decolonial forms of feminist solidarity

and being-knowing, and discuss their ethical and political commitments very openly in their work. They all, in their differing ways, either through feminist narrative methodology (Smith), feminist ethnographic methodology (Mason-Deese, Marneweck), queer decolonial feminist (QDF) methodology (Nirmal), or decolonizing feminist Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Motta), seek to co-create the conditions of possibility for the telling of “other” stories. Such stories enact enfolded and existential coming into being of racialized subaltern women and their communities which subvert and dislodge hegemonic renditions of Reason, the Law, and Truth which attempt to render them mute, absent, or pathological.

For all our authors, such a methodological commitment involves, in one way or another, a return to the body and the embodied, and a new poetics of embodied knowing/ledge. Such a return cannot be enacted through the lens of critical distance and abstraction as separation, which is common to masculinist and Euro-centric theoretical traditions and practices of knowing-being, as we have argued above and in previous writings. Rather, as Mason-Deese argues, this means “recognizing that self-reflective knowledge production is a fundamental element of this new form of politics”. This underlines the need for actively embracing the unlearning of academic privilege and transforming the divisions of labor and alienating practices of knowing-about within which such privileges of the geo-politics of coloniality are embedded.

For Nirmal, this means queering the very binaries and boundaries between knower and known, mind and body, concrete and universal, which are characteristic of 20th century forms of hegemonic and critical theorizing of resistance and the political. Like this, binaries which produce a knowing-researcher positioned as the subject that can both visualize and theorize domination and guide liberation, are disrupted and jettisoned. Instead, as Marneweck describes, it is the fostering of practices and performances of self and/as other in which we can co-create diverse, yet overlapping strategies for meaning-making, new languages of resistances, and tongues of social and political change. This requires, as Motta continues, the researcher moving away from representing the “other” and rather, moving “towards collective problem-solving, healing, and transformation”.

Arguably, the researcher(s) become(s) a storyteller(s), but such a storyteller that is neither unitary nor separate yet rather a committed co-creator of “other” enfolded stories in which “we” come into knowing-being. This involves a step away from seeking to discover one Truth and one emancipatory political rationality and subjectivity, and rather emphasizes ontological and epistemological multiplicity and diversity through practices which nurture critical intimacy. Such a praxis, as Motta describes, necessitates “An epistemological stepping inwards which involves nurturing and experimenting with knowledge processes in which we collectively bring to awareness how systems of oppression wound us as communities and as individuals”. Yet, as she continues:

it is of no surprise that decolonizing epistemological practices comes from those who inhabit the epistemological margins of colonial difference. They emerge out of the struggle and practice against ontological and epistemological denial as outsiders-within formal education and in the multiple informal spaces of everyday life and community organizing against processes of subjectification of coloniality.

This does not, however, imply erasing the complex and non-unitary power differences between researcher and her research subjects. On the contrary, as Nirmal argues, it requires “reflexivity and respect in all research settings”. To support this, she positions her own research within a *space of queerness*, where the researcher, the researched and the research itself are queered by difference in their marginalities, oppressions, and liberations, and united by the common goal of decolonizing understandings, experiences, and practices:

Within this *space of queerness* it becomes possible to question the ways in which marginality comes to be constructed, and recognize the agency of each entity in relation to the other. The *space of queerness*, in my analysis, accommodates multiple marginal positions, serving as an inclusive, shifting space of borderlands, and thus offers a more complex, less rigid understanding... As a relational, decolonial zone, it allows the centering of previously marginal beings and ideas by recognizing both

the shifting nature of marginality whereby the marginal is often within, and sometimes alongside the center, and the operation of marginality as a modality of resistance.

Onto-Epistemological Listening

Decolonizing feminist and queering methodologies described above are committed to dislodging patriarchal capitalist-coloniality premised as it is on closure to listening to other epistemological grounds of becoming. This requires enacting a practice and politics of listening. Such listening is epistemologically pushing us towards our borders of self in an effort to reach out beyond the categorizations used to name, shame, and tame us.

Listening such as this is both a starting point and also a premise of a political practice that seeks to prefigure resistance and decolonizing as research. In Kate Smith's work this has, for example, included the use of a reflexive and multi-layered interpretive approach called the Listening Guide which "provides a research process that can disrupt and challenge dominant narratives told about women's lives", enabling "a different subjectivity to bear upon the old 'universality'" (Brown and Gilligan, 1992: 16 cited in Smith, this issue).

For Marneweck and Nirmal, such listening practices entail attentiveness to the rhythms of the black female body and the sacred body of the earth. Additionally, epistemological listening embraces and is inscribed in practices of "ritual, living sculpture, presence, symbol, slippage and embodiment" which, as Marneweck continues, are places in which we can encounter "expression that provides a feminized strategy for r-evolutionary creative practices".

This listening not only calls for attentiveness to the other as external subject and being. It also necessitates the uncertain, often discomforting, and fragile practice of internal listening that enables a blurring of the borders between self and other, and a return to all that we have exiled. Such homecoming to a third space of the inappropriate other, as Motta describes, nurtures the kinds of reciprocal relationality of co-healing and transformation that can work to dislodge the traces of coloniality dwelling within and between us.

Spaces and practices of epistemological listening involve creating the conditions of possibility for a speaking from the silence – silence that has been enforced by the violent misrepresentations of Power; silence that has become habit as a practice of survival; silence that is a mark of our traumatized collective bodies, minds, and psyches. In doing so, we can foreground the urgency of reading trauma politically and thus bringing from the margins to the centre healing as emancipation.

An Ethics of Care and Care-fullness

Listening in this way is not possible for the White masculinist knower. For such a knower is a careless subject, able to distance and distract away and over the messiness of everyday encounters, needs, and suffering. Such a praxis can but emerge through a collective politics of care and caring, as Mason-Deese so wonderfully describes through the stories and experiences of women in unemployed workers' movements and communities in Argentina. This, as Annette Maguire describes in her book review of Isabell Lorey's *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, entails valuing the labor of caring and social reproduction that has been traditionally relegated to women's work, invisible, and/or devalued. Here, we would argue that feminisms from the margins, particularly those that have resisted commodification and institutionalization, are of particular importance if "we are to think in common and materialize affective solidarity by investing in hope and labour in the politics against the governing terror which increasingly deepens and cements the ultimate precarity of women's bodies and labour, life and thought" (Husanović, 2015: 20).

An ethics of care and nurturing calls for taking seriously the conditions which make collaborative feminist decolonizing and queering knowing-praxis possible (and impossible). Without such attentiveness, the collaborations that we co-create run the risk of re-producing the very same exclusions, elisions, and silences which render us absent and isolated. This means taking seriously and reading politically questions such as food, childcare, housing, mental and physical health, and embedded trauma. These labors of love – or, acts and practices of love as described in Tiina Seppälä's book review of bell hooks' *All about Love* – necessitate the co-creation of new languages and literacies that begin from the body, for the body is already-always inscribed in the speaking from the experi-

ence of being violently rendered abject and absent.

Such care-full labor is tender, slow, and often centers on what might otherwise be considered the mundane and outside of, or a distraction away from, the political. However, we believe that it is by weaving the magic of the everyday into conditions of our speaking, that we might foreground the possibilities of a politics with which we can nurture the self-liberation of our communities, and the co-creation of an autonomous feminized politics of resistance otherwise.

New Beginnings...

Birthing worlds
writing silence
breathing life into liminality,

excavating from the denied.
Tenderly holding
to find the will to write

something shared, already
carried in collective memory
enfleshed into be-ing,

wandering through shadows
surviving dark alleys
swimming in the deep.

I journey with you;
this eternal multiple journey
where 'I' is multiple too.

Storytellers re-rooted into life
passionate listening
nurturing care-fully desire.

We look Medusa in the face
realizing her beauty,
realizing we are not mistakes.

Speaking whispers
delicate tongues
feminized politics otherwise.

In Newcastle, Australia and Rovaniemi, Finland
Sara and Tiina, 28th November 2016

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Telling Stories of Resistance and Ruination: Women Seeking Asylum¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationships between narratives which have come to dominate in the twenty-first century about people seeking asylum and women's stories of resistance and ruination. Identifying two narratives – the “babe figure” and the “female victim” – I develop understandings about some of the social, legal and historical contexts in Britain in which these narratives have come to dominate. Drawing on an Economic and Social Research Council funded project with women seeking asylum to explore some of the ways narratives can generate possibilities for some women, this paper also identifies how narratives can be deeply problematic for those who struggle to tell a story. Taking a feminist perspective and narrative approach, four analytical frameworks are used to make sense of how and why women tell their stories, offering a critical theoretical engagement with the concepts of resistance and ruination. The analysis opens up an important space that highlights the importance of narrative forms of resistance and consequently enriches our understanding of the diversity of forms of feminized resistance in the context of the emerging field of resistance studies. In doing so, I also explore how and why women might tell stories of ruination and some of the constraints placed on their stories. I position resistance as necessary for research processes that seek to disrupt and challenge the formation of dominant narratives. I argue for new and different narratives which accommodate some of the complexities and

¹ My appreciation to the women whose stories are represented in this paper. The impact of their accounts have been central to my ongoing work alongside women seeking asylum. Thanks and acknowledgement to the Economic and Social Research Council for the financial support (ES/H011803/1) for the research on which this paper draws. Warm thanks to the reviewers for their constructive feedback that helped improve the quality of the paper and the positive feedback on the final draft. My gratitude to the editors for their respectful and relational approach that is both radical and necessary.

contradictions of women's lives and open up the possibilities for women to tell their own diverse and different stories.

Introduction

Drawing on my own Economic and Social Research Council funded research, this paper examines the relationships between dominant narratives about people seeking asylum and women's own stories of resistance and ruination. Bringing together feminist perspectives and narrative approaches, I highlight some of the ways research can be employed to understand the lives of women seeking asylum. The analysis opens up a critical space that emphasizes the importance of narrative forms of resistance and the diversity of forms of feminized resistance in the context of the emerging field of resistance studies. Caring deeply about the issue of migration, I came to this research consciously motivated by my academic, political, personal and intellectual biography. A researcher and practitioner with a long history of working with women and children seeking asylum, my commitment to the defense of human rights and civil liberties has included highlighting and opposing the grave inequalities and injustices faced by people seeking asylum across the globe. Over the decades I have increasingly come to recognize that many injustices are sanctioned or carried out by different social actors within powerful structures (such as the state, public, and media) which increasingly vilify and dehumanize people seeking asylum (Cohen, 2002; Tyler, 2006). Dominant narratives told about people seeking asylum have come to position them in particularly negative ways (Chakrabarti, 2015; Cohen, 2002; Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013) and I feel a sense of responsibility to explore, understand, disrupt and challenge dominant narratives. This has fuelled my commitment to ensure my research endeavors are progressive and try to generate different ways of making sense of stories. As Plummer (2013: 209) states, "we need always be mindful of the tales we tell and the tales we hear: for stories have consequences. We should always be careful of the tales we tell for stories and their documents are our futures".

My own interest in asylum derives from and is grounded in the capacity of women seeking asylum as agentic subjects, whose lives are not simply represented in dominant narratives, but are also produced by their own stories. As such, my epistemological approach rejects the

view that there is one “truth” or one story for researchers to discover, but rather that all stories are liberated, informed and constrained by the social, political and historical contexts of their telling (Plummer, 1995). I suggest that the concept of “one truth” delimits the possibilities for telling stories of asylum and leaves those whose lives do not fit neatly into this narrative framework without a story to tell (Woodiwiss, 2014). Taking a feminist perspective and narrative approach, this paper explores how and why women seeking asylum come to narrate their lives. Whilst there is a large body of literature concerned with either narrative or feminist research, this paper contributes to that body of literature whilst also seeking to expand the scarcity of literature that brings feminist perspectives and narrative approaches together. In doing so, I attend to some of the concerns of feminist narrative researchers in the context of the emerging field of resistance studies.

Drawing on the work of Cindi Katz, I develop an analytical narrative framework of nuanced resistances, in order to make sense of how and why women might tell the stories they do. The transformative potential of diverse resistances is one of the ways in which dominant narratives are negotiated, circumvented and resisted. Furthermore, drawing on the work of Arthur Frank, I go on to explore how and why women also tell stories of ruination which exposes the constraints placed on women’s stories. In order to create possibilities for women’s lives and to potentially improve the lives of women seeking asylum, this paper attempts to open up a space that resists narratives that constrain and delimit the lives of women, and allows for different stories to be told and heard. This approach reflects some of the social changes that many of the participants said they wanted from their participation in this research:

I would like you use me as a case study... to enlight people about refugees and most especially about women refugees... I think use this opportunity now... pass the information. (May)²

Make a difference, make a difference. (Naomi)

² Every attempt has been made to retain the words and expressions that each woman used in their interview. I have consciously presented all of the women’s quotes verbatim and have not corrected grammatical errors.

Telling Stories

For women seeking asylum, where being granted asylum depends on the credibility and authenticity of their stories of persecution (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013), the meaning of asylum can be profound. However, stories about asylum (like all other stories) are contingent on the available narratives that shape and inform what we know and can tell of asylum. None of us are entirely free to tell any story and the articulation of stories is accomplished in relation to available narrative frameworks (Plummer, 1995). Shaped, informed and constrained by the circumstances and contexts in which we tell our stories, the relationship between narratives and stories is necessary in order for stories to be understandable and “tellable” (Andrews, 2014). Narratives impact the way in which storytellers understand, respond to, negotiate, and resist stories about their lives. They can serve as powerful social forms of control (Lockwood, forthcoming) influencing the particular stories told about certain groups of people and also informing the stories that people tell. As such, our lives are not simply represented in stories, but are produced through, and at times constrained by, our own stories and the storytelling of others.

Storytelling may be a deeply personal process and activity, particularly when we talk about our lives. However, as Woodiwiss (2014: 13) suggests, “In telling our stories we do not simply slot ourselves into readymade narratives but we do draw on stories or narrative frameworks that are currently circulating and these are both culturally and historically specific”. The subject positions that we take up within our stories may serve to explain our actions and decisions, moderating the ways people understand us. Through our storytelling, we can construct our identities, consciously or unconsciously. As such, those people seeking asylum make sense of their lives and tell their stories in relation to dominant narratives, whilst other asylum experiences will not fit neatly into these narrative frameworks and their stories are at risk of being overlooked, silenced, and unrecognized (Smith, 2015a, 2015b, forthcoming).

Seeking Asylum

Seeking asylum is not a new phenomenon; each year across the globe women, children, and men seek asylum in other countries. A feature of contemporary migratory movements, asylum seeking is frequently a

form of forced migration and an interrelated aspect of broader transnational mobility that takes place across and within the national boundaries of countries and states (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). The social, political and historical conditions under which women are forced to migrate has meant that the vast majority of displaced women never claim asylum (Freedman, 2008). Gendered relations and inequalities in different countries affect women's migration in varying ways and reduced access to the necessary resources, such as documentation and finances, may enable them more easily to migrate or constrain and limit their opportunities. Those who are fleeing persecution or have been displaced primarily remain within their country of origin or cross an immediate border to a neighboring (and potentially less prosperous) country, possibly living within refugee camps (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009).

Managing people who had been displaced from their countries of origin and who seek the protection of other states has become an increasing priority across Europe. In response to the gross human rights atrocities and significant gaps in the protection of people that were exposed in the latter half of the 20th century (particularly during the First and Second World Wars), a legal form of asylum seeking emerged (Chakrabarti, 2015; Sirriyeh, 2013). A number of international protocols were developed and ratified as states sought to address the social, political and historical context of migration, standardizing and globalizing state responses (Malkki, 1996). The concept of international protection is enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948 UNGA Res 217 A(III) (UDHR) art 5) which specifies, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy asylum from persecution in other countries" (Article 14). The Declaration sets out fundamental human rights to be universally protected and marks a clear acknowledgement of common standards for all peoples and all nations. The 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention), and 1967 Protocol, form the legal basis for states to grant asylum and it is intended to ensure the rights, protection and provision for the adequate treatment of refugees. The principle of protecting refugees was formed on the basis that signatory States were legally bound to provide protection.

All contracting States who have ratified the Refugee Convention are able to grant asylum to individuals they feel demonstrate compatibility with the Refugee Convention definition of a refugee, or refuse people who they feel do not. The product of a particular time, the refugee definition is underpinned by the core principle of non-refoulement, which asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom and dominated by the concept of “male” persecution within the “political and public” spheres. Gender-based persecution (amongst a number of other forms of persecution) is omitted as a determining factor for receiving refugee status and the gendered language of the definition overlooks the serious threats to the lives or freedoms of a number of groups, including women and girls (Sirriyeh, 2013). As such, one particular narrative framework to emerge in the twenty-first century is that of the “male political refugee”, a “morally untouchable category” (Cohen, 2002: xix) synonymous with a “genuine” need for international protection. Informed by definitions and judgments of refugees being “genuine” and “men”, women have been primarily viewed as the dependents of the political activities of men and “not genuine” (Freedman, 2008; Hunt, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005).

The Hate Figure

As Plummer states: “different moments have highlighted different stories” (1995: 4) and “as societies’ change, so stories change” (1995: 79). Stories about the protection of other human beings have become increasingly fragile and complex, with Britain an “especially bad point in case” (Chakrabarti, 2015). Political, legal and public debates have produced endless discussions and generated doubt and concern about the motivations and legitimacy of those seeking asylum (Hunt, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). In the last two decades, whilst the story of the “genuine refugee” has been maintained in various diminishing forms, those seeking asylum have become storied as “hate figures” and clear signals sent out that they are unwelcome “others” (Chakrabarti, 2015). The “hate figure” is constructed through a number of intersecting stories, including the distinct term “bogus asylum seeker” (Cohen, 2002) which emerged in the early 1990s in the media. This concept gave rise to a problematic binary that a person’s asylum claim (and indeed the

person claiming asylum) could be either “genuine” or “false”. Indeed, the “bogus asylum seeker” solidified the belligerent notion that people seeking asylum are not genuine refugees and are actually attempting to exploit public generosity and governments, and are unworthy of public sympathy or support (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013).

Successive governments have contributed to the creation of the “hate figure” which includes stories of asylum seekers as illegal and threatening, positioning those seeking asylum as a threat to welfare benefits, public spending, employment opportunities and to national identity (Cohen, 2002; Hunt, 2005; Jordan and Düvell, 2003; Sirriyeh, 2013; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). New measures have been instituted by governments including administrative detention, forced dispersal, and deportation. Much research over the last decade makes evident that the multiple social exclusions and vulnerabilities experienced by those seeking asylum emanate from a raft of damaging, tough, and punitive policies and practices brought to bear against them (Hunt, 2005; Tyler, 2006).

The dehumanization and denigration of people seeking asylum is rarely as evident as in the narratives that have come to dominate in Britain (Chakrabarti, 2015). A study of media reports concerning asylum seekers in Britain concluded that dominant narratives are generated and reproduced through repeated accounts of suspicion, and that there is public support for all efforts to deter migration, including potential exclusion of those seeking asylum (Kundnani, 2001; Sirriyeh, 2013). The “hate figure” has become a proxy for increased border enforcement and security on border entry. As Andrews (2014: 88) argues “... narratives play a critical role in creating and recreating history”. In an increasingly nationalistic and securitized era, the “hate figure” encompasses the exclusion and dehumanization of those seeking asylum. This dominant narrative serves to strengthen distinctions between those who are seeking asylum and those who have been granted legal protection and are recognized as “genuine” refugees.

The Female Victim

Until recently, asylum seeking has been storied as the province of men and assumptions about the “asylum seeker” as “male” have prevailed. Women seeking asylum have been overlooked and marginalized (Freed-

man, 2008; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009). Where there is an emerging body of research about women seeking asylum, narratives contain much discussion about victimization and particular forms of gendered persecutions. That gendered violence against women takes place during conflict and war has long been recognized, and is increasingly documented. Citing the ways in which women seeking asylum are commonly understood as victims of sexual violence, campaigners and political organizations have suggested women are also constantly under assault and perpetually victimized (Womankind, 2012). The literature assumes a linear progression and as a result of the trauma associated with such atrocities, women seeking asylum are often understood to be traumatized by violence (Herlihy and Turner, 2007). This is a story that relies on particular understandings of sexual violence and gendered victimization in which women seeking asylum are seen as: “de-served... disposed, disorientated, dislocated, dismembered, stateless, nameless, landless, homeless, and powerless” (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009: 38). Those women whose experiences do not fit within this narrative may be left outside of the “female victim” story, unrecognized and silenced.

Victimization and gendered persecution typically characterize stories told about women seeking asylum, making it very difficult to tell their stories of agency and/or resistance. The dominant narrative of the “female victim” (Smith, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, forthcoming) has contributed to a heightened awareness and understanding of women seeking asylum as vulnerable and much of the literature on women seeking asylum has exposed the disproportionately huge numbers of women being victimized in war (UNWomen, 2011; Womankind, 2012). These stories are often told as an attempt to increase legal protection and human rights for individual women and groups of women, and to expose undeniable poor treatments and abuses of women with the aim of improving their lives. However, the ongoing story of the victimization of women seeking asylum is told at a cost and has meant that (some) women have “stop[ped] being [viewed as] specific persons and become pure victims in general” (Malkki, 1996: 378).

Stories about the “female victim” have become integral to dominant narratives told about women seeking asylum, providing (some) women with a framework within which to have their asylum claims rec-

ognized (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013). Required by the Home Office to provide an “asylum story” as the central component of their asylum claim, being granted legal protection as a refugee demands a person establish their identity as a victim – “a person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted” (Refugee Convention). Shuman and Bohmer (2014: 952) note, “...applicants have to be willing to present themselves in those terms, as persecuted and not protected.... [to] portray themselves as victims of persecution”. By producing their own victim identities, women can negotiate and resist the difficulties posed by the asylum decision-making process (Smith, 2014, 2015b).

The growing awareness about women’s migration and their role as caregivers and mothers has produced a further narrative synonymous with the “female victim”. The grouping of women and children together has become a popular way of representing women and a substantial amount of literature perpetuates the association between the two groups (Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009). Cultural perceptions of “normative” gendered behavior, with women as “mothers”, play a role in dominant narratives told about women seeking asylum. This is often done to highlight, in terms of numbers, the scale of the “problem”. For example, in 2016, the United National High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) put out the statement “just over 55 per cent of those arriving [on the shores of Europe] are women and children, as compared to only 27 per cent in June 2015” (UNHCR, 2016). The propensity to amalgamate women and children together potentially infantilizes and distorts any detailed understanding of women’s lives and the vast differences between individual women (and children).

When women do claim their status as storytelling subjects, judgments are made about women in relation to decisions about their children. Shuman and Bohmer (2014: 948) argue, “in some cases [asylum] judges decided that the behaviour of a woman was not credible because she didn’t conform to their expectations about motherhood, for example by leaving her children behind with relatives when she fled. Sometimes the reverse is true and mothers seeking asylum are not deemed credible because they didn’t flee immediately but waited until they could flee with their children”. These assumptions underpin dominant narratives which shape and constrain the stories women tell and prevent (some) women

from emerging as subjects with their own needs beyond those associated with children.

Listening to Women's Stories

Listening to the stories of women seeking asylum was a starting point of the research which informs this paper. I conducted in-depth narrative interviews with seventeen women which were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The interviews lasted between one and a half and three hours and were carried out in a wide range of different locations across the UK. The women had been living in the UK for different periods of time, ranging from a couple of months to seven years. They were aged between their early 20s and mid-50s and came from 14 different countries of origin: Algeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gambia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra-Leone, Somalia, South Africa and Zimbabwe. To safeguard their anonymity, their names were replaced with pseudonyms and, to facilitate a more participatory approach, the women chose their own pseudonyms (including "Z", who wanted to be known by the 26th and final letter of the modern English Alphabet). Every effort has been made to ensure that no information could lead to a participant being identified.

All of the women had made a claim for asylum in the UK and at the time of the research interviews were at different stages of their asylum claims process. However, it was not an intention of the research to question the "credibility" of the stories that women tell when they claim asylum, but rather to value and listen to women's stories. Also, the analysis was not intended to listen to the participants' stories in order to validate "the truth" or authenticity of their lived experiences, but rather sought to ask questions about the accounts so that we can begin to understand not only the stories, but the context of the lives that informed those accounts. Asking questions about women's stories can enable us to look beyond dominant narratives to explore the constraints to those stories, exposing and potentially resisting those constraints and opening up other possibilities for women's lives.

Recognizing that data analysis is a site where the power of the researcher may be particularly pronounced (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008), choosing an appropriate form of analysis was important. As Mauthner

and Doucet (1998: 139) foreground, “analysis is a crucial stage of the research as it carries the potential to decrease or amplify the volume of our respondents’ voices”. How we come to know narrated subjects relies strongly on our own subjectivities and reflexivity on the part of the researcher to explore the interpretations they bring to the analysis and research process (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). The method that I utilized is a reflexive and multi-layered interpretive approach called the Listening Guide (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998, 2003). This feminist narrative method of data analysis provides a research process that can disrupt and challenge dominant narratives told about women’s lives. Described as a “resisting listener’s guide”, it enables listeners to “bring a different subjectivity to bear upon the old ‘universality’...” (Brown and Gilligan, 1992: 16).

Once the interview transcripts were collected, I carried out a minimum of four sequential readings, outlined in the Listening Guide, across the individual transcripts (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Simultaneously, the Listening Guide was used to listen to the women as agentic storytelling subjects whose lives are produced by their stories and who play an active role in reacting to, intervening in and resisting dominant narratives. Paying close attention to their stories and working slowly, I was able to “stay with the data” (Doucet and Mauthner, 2008: 129). As Plummer (2013: 212) states,

... stories are never transparent all at once: they are rarely immediately clear. Narrative understanding requires the space to sit and stare, ponder and puzzle and life often does not offer such a space. But like a slow moving veil or curtain, the wisdoms of our stories can be revealed gradually. We grasp our meanings slowly, bit by bit. We need time to appreciate stories.

I considered the question of why and how women told their stories and this process helped me to re-visit my understandings of how particular dominant narratives informed and constrained (some) women’s stories.

Hearing Resistance and Ruination

The women used the interviews as a site and context to establish accounts of sexual violence and persecution and that they feared persecution if they were returned to their countries of origin. As I listened to the women's stories of persecution, I came to understand that their stories had inter-related narrative frameworks embedded within them, many of which have been overlooked in the formation of dominant narratives. I identified these as analytical frameworks of resistance and ruination, working in relation to each other as resources for telling and listening to the women's stories and also making reflexive connections with my own activities and struggles. My stories of resistance were not the same but were relationally entwined with those of the women in this study and it became important to define and distinguish what I meant by resistance within the women's stories.

Concepts of resistance are frequently bound up with "acts of resistance" and everyday actions cast as resistance that can be considered as effective or ineffective (Scott, 1985; Riessman, 2000). Non-compliance as opposition to social relations has become a popular way of delineating resistance and a wide range of oppositional activities have been considered resistance, from overt acts of challenge to more subtle forms of survival (Katz, 2004; Scott, 1985). Troubling the notions of resistance as visible to an external audience, Bosworth and Carrabine (2001) acknowledge personal or intimate activities, as well as practices and behaviors of resistance in response to a subtle and complex set of different circumstances and situations. Particularly relevant to studies of women and resistance, Catherine Riessman's (2000) analysis of the stigma of childlessness in India suggests that women negotiated and mitigated the stigma through a range of everyday resistance strategies. Also, Lila Abu-Lugoe's (1990) study of control over sexuality and marriage illustrates the different ways that Bedouin women attempted to use humor and create folklore through shared tales as a form of resistance. These studies both highlight diverse of forms that gendered resistance has taken.

Given the popularity of the concept of resistance, scholars have argued that resistance has become such an inclusive and romantic term that it is identified by researchers in everything and seen everywhere (Abu-Lugoe, 1990; Katz, 2004). Concepts of resistances have also been

criticized for “misattribute[ing] women’s stories with intentions where none exists” (Abel and Browner, 1998: 322). Providing a useful departure point to make sense of the stories of women seeking asylum, I utilized the analytical framework of resistances developed by Cindi Katz (2004). Opposed to ambiguous definitions of the term resistance, Katz (2004) makes conceptual distinctions between “resistance” and the more subtle forms of “resilience” and “reworking” which resonate with the stories of women in my research. Seeking to build on, conserve and identify women’s personal resources within their stories, Katz’s (2004) three frameworks of resistance identify the capacities and potentialities that people have for promoting change, sustaining themselves and their communities when faced with adversity.

Utilizing a nuanced understanding of resistance that is both contextual and relational, I argue here for a shift in perception in the way we look at women’s stories. Katz (2004) assumes that through her observations, knowledge of resistance, reworking, and resilience become accessible, privileging a notion of resistance as an inherent, natural and individual attribute that one has or does not have. However, my interest in the role of resistance in this paper is premised on a different understanding. Taking a feminist narrative approach to women’s stories, I used the concepts of resistance within a narrative framework (Frank, 1995; Plummer, 1995; Doucet and Mauthner, 2008). The argument here is not for resistance as individualized, oppositional behavior/actions that reflect whether a woman’s actions have or do not have “transformative effects” (Riessman, 2000: 130), but rather a nuanced understanding of resistance to explore women’s stories. In this, I take my cue from Katz’s (2004) delineations of resistances, but use these concepts as narrative frameworks to explore the different ways resistance is constructed within women’s stories.

As I listened to the women’s stories, I also turned to the worrying attribute of resistance that has asserted a tragic story and demanded an aspirational heroic figure. As Conlon (2007: 206) suggests, people seeking asylum are sometimes burdened with telling stories of themselves as “... heroes in the face of omnipotent forces”. Expectation of resistance has given rise to euphoric celebrations of “the resourcefulness of human spirit” (Langer, 1991: xi). Heroic attributes of “resistance” are examples

of narrative frameworks that can constrain the stories of women seeking asylum. Drawing on work of Arthur Frank, I utilized the analytical framework of Frank's (1995) "Chaos narrative". Frank's work explores stories of critical illness told in relation to the body and he outlines the storyline of "the chaos narrative", which "imagines life never getting better" (1995: 97). The Chaos narrative reveals a life of "vulnerability, futility, and impotence" (Frank, 1995: 97) and stories are manifest with moments of irreparable "wreckage" (Frank, 1995: 110). These storylines served to develop what I have called the narrative of ruination, the fourth narrative framework which I use to explore women's stories.

Narratives of Women Seeking Asylum

My analysis produced four overarching narratives that framed the women's stories. I identify these frameworks as the narratives of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination. In this section of the paper, I explore the participant's lives through their stories in order to make sense of how and why they might tell the stories they do. Maintaining the relationship between the different narrative frameworks, and hearing them as necessarily relational, avoids any one of the narratives becoming singular or dominant. Important too is the understanding that these four narratives are types of stories and are not intended to be representative of different types of women seeking asylum.

1. The Narrative of Resistance

The narrative of resistance is used as an opportunity for the women to tell stories of challenge and as a result these are also stories that directly challenge some of the dominant narratives told about women seeking asylum. Rather than focusing on the ways in which they survive and endure (the narrative of resilience), or telling stories of indirect resistances (the narrative of reworking), I illustrate the ways some women told stories of their political consciousness-building and oppositional activities and agendas. Speaking out about their solidarity with other women, they storied their commitment to improving the lives of women seeking asylum which was part of participating in the research. Taking up active subject positions as protagonists within their stories, resistance was storied as an active initiative that involved direct challenges and contesting

situations of oppression and conditions of exploitation. Suggesting they are political subjects (Cohen, 2002), these stories develop our understandings of women asylum seekers as “political refugees”, challenging the concept of the “political refugee” as “male” which is embedded in the origins of the Refugee Convention, and negates the passivity of the “female victim”.

Challenge

At the forefront of some women’s stories, they revealed how they wanted to be understood as political activists. Z suggests: “... I was involved, especially with the woman’s rights...”. For Lucy, her activism was related to human rights: “I joined human rights work...”. Telling stories about being involved with activities that work for human rights, these women refuted dominant narratives of passivity and stigma. In constructing a political sense of self and the activities in their lives, these women repositioned themselves as political figures, who actively engage in important political struggles. Claims about their activities in the past allowed the women to make declarations about their present and political campaigning. Bintou suggested that she was challenging the arrangement of polygamous marriage³ and levirate marriage⁴, both of which she said she had experienced and resisted. Shimmar suggested she was a victim of a child/early marriage⁵ in the UK. Brought into the UK, she said she became the victim of years of abuse perpetrated by family members. Locked in the marital home, not allowed to open the front door and forbidden to look out of the window, Shimmar said she was active in trying to end this type of abuse: “woman like me they are helping to stop it and help woman”.

A number of women also told stories about their roles as protagonists, struggling to challenge inequalities about wider issues. For Precious, campaigning for “gay rights”, as a direct response to the sexuality of her youngest brother and the subsequent discrimination and abuse

³ Marriage to more than one spouse.

⁴ A marriage in which a widow is obliged to marry her deceased husband’s brother.

⁵ A formal marriage or informal union entered into by an individual before reaching the age of 18.

he had experienced, was important: “I had to fight hard against these attitudes for gay rights”.

Utilizing their personal experiences as political stories, the women suggested a sense of their entitlement to speak out. This included the different ways in which some women storied the asylum system as deeply problematic. A number of women said they had attempted to challenge attitudes and improve the hostile environment. May, for example, outlined how she tried to change the general public’s attitude to the term refugee:

... there should be more understanding about diversity and equal rights and experience that surround the word ‘refugee’ which we promote. Promote to the people and keep talking about it. (May)

Some of the activities that women took part in contributed to building resistance (Katz, 2004). The women constructed their role in changing the broader public’s views and challenging politicians on asylum policies. For Naomi, this included campaigning and the associated risks of publicly speaking out against the practice of detention:

... my aim was to talk about child detention and I received a lot of support ... I made a lot of links with the media, lots and it was quite tremendous... I was like putting my life down for the sake of helping other people. (Naomi)

Speaking up and speaking out was an important part of being identified as political. By taking part in this study, a number of the women indicated their solidarity with other women and their commitment to improving the situations of women seeking asylum. For May, taking part in the research was about improving asylum policy: “I like to take part in this research because want to improve the policy for women refugee. I like the voice of women to be heard and for women to be respected” (May).

Highlighting their determination, several of the women spoke about challenging the inequalities that women face. As May said: “... no matter who you are, no matter where you are, all you have to do is have a view, walk towards it and be determined... I believe there is nothing you

cannot do”. Anne-Laure also talked about being a source of inspiration for other women: “... showing other women the chances or possibilities...”. Central to many of these accounts was the suggestion that the lives of women seeking asylum contained wider lessons. As Naomi argued: “...I thought I should contribute to this research so that my story can be part of a lesson...” (Naomi).

Speaking as agentic subjects who honored their own stories, a number of the women suggested that their own situations might not be improved by their political activity, but they worked for the greater good of all women. Bintou suggested: “I know I may not benefit from it now, but in future... if it is positive that women can benefit from it”. Queenie also noted: “...what I said can be contributed to making refugee woman that comes, or asylum seeker, their life a little bit easier”. The narrative of resistance illustrates that women seeking asylum tell stories within which they wish to be viewed as protagonists, engaged in resistance activities. Striving to be viewed as activists, the interview itself was a site of protest where they suggested lessons could be learned.

2. The Narrative of Reworking

The narrative of reworking is heavily orientated to stories of indirect resistance. The storyteller is able to construct positive self-meanings, albeit constrained by dominant narratives that position women asylum seekers as “hate figures”. Different to the narrative of resilience which enables women to emphasize the ways in which they survived their situations, the narrative of reworking illustrates some of the ways women attempt to change and negotiate the identity of being an asylum seeker. Some of the women suggested the ways they construct more positive self-meanings that distinguished them from being identified as an “asylum seeker”, which avoided being seen as a “hate figure”. I also illustrate the ways some women lay claim to their own legitimacy and validated their asylum identities through stories of persecution and by calling attention to the severe consequences for them and their children if they are refused asylum and deported. These stories negotiate the dominant narrative of the “female victim” and offer further understandings about this narrative, as well as upholding the dominant narrative of the “genuine refugee”.

Indirect Resistance

Some women spoke about the difficulties of being identified as an asylum seeker or refugee and the ways in which it attracts vilification. For Precious, being identified as a refugee was: “Horrible. Crazy. I don’t want to be a refugee... it’s not nice to be”. Similarly, Lucy emphasized some of the problems of being an asylum seeker: “It’s not a good term... You feel dehumanised when you are seeking asylum. You don’t have dignity”. The dominant narrative of the “hate figure” was understood by many of the women and they suggested it was deeply problematic for their everyday lives. A number of the women gave numerous accounts of the ways in which they felt they had been badly treated as a result of being identified as an asylum seeker or refugee. Bintou indicated that if you are an asylum seeker in the UK: “You are not welcome...”. Similarly, Queenie argued that people distinguished between people: “I think people who don’t realise you’re a refugee they treat you different. Once they realise you’re refugee it’s another story altogether...”.

In order to distinguish themselves from being identified as an “asylum seeker”, several of the women told stories about the ways they construct alternative stories. For Love, her story was bound up in the romantic notion of seeking love: “I always call myself love-seeker not asylum-seeker”. Shimmar also said she had chosen a less problematic identity and only told people she was an “asylum seeker” when necessary:

I don’t tell anyone I am an asylum seeker... say I’m just study here...
I don’t want to tell. If I don’t need to tell you than I don’t tell you.
(Shimmar)

Avoiding being identified as “asylum seekers” and offering differing accounts of their presence in the UK, a number of the women negotiated being identified as “hate figures”. Constrained by the available narratives, the women cast themselves in new stories (Katz, 2004).

While some of the participants said they did not want to be identified as asylum seekers, many of them suggested there was another potentially more positive identity. Utilizing the dominant narrative of the “genuine refugee” (Hunt, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; Cohen, 2002),

some of the women emphasized the severe consequences for them if they were refused asylum. A number of women said they would be killed if they were returned to their country of origin. For Gloria, being sent home was a death sentence: "... sending me back to... my country is like sending me back to my grave". Bintou and Diane also suggested they would die if they are deported from the UK: "It would be death to go home" and "I will die if they deport me". Anne-Laure said that she would be killed: "I will be killed back home". Highlighting her own legitimacy, Bintou argued that she is concerned for the sexual abuse her children would suffer if the family was to be deported: "... if she [daughter] goes back to [country of origin] now she'll be circumcised again... she'll be cut [FGM]". Illustrated through the narrative of reworking, the women suggested they are "genuine refugees" because of persecution and the lack of State protection in their home countries. Through their stories, women were also able to indirectly resist other motivations that may have been associated with seeking asylum.

3. The Narrative of Resilience

The most subtle aspect of resistance is heard in the narrative of resilience, illustrating the different ways women survive and endure their lives in the face of great adversity. Different from the narrative of resistance and reworking (stories about challenge and indirect resistance), the narrative of resilience is used to emphasize the difficulties and pain of women's situations. I focus here on the ways in which the women suggested they survived and endured living apart from their children. As I have previously suggested in this paper, great significance is often attached to the "female victim" and the role of women and children in relation to women seeking asylum (Freedman, 2008; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, 2009). However, none of the women who participated in this research had all of their children living with them. Whilst existing narratives can provide meaning about mothering, women seeking asylum, who have seemingly fled without their children, may find it difficult to access "good mothering" narratives. Despite their situations, a number of the women described the diverse ways in which they protected and cared for their children. Living apart was in many ways the ultimate en-

durance, premised on their identities as good protective mothers meeting the needs associated with their children.

Survival and Endurance

Through their accounts of living apart from their children, many of the women suggested they were breaking with deeply held beliefs about mothering. Constructing stories of the pain of being separated and leaving her children behind, Queenie said: “That’s what makes me sad mostly. It’s being separated from my son”. Similarly Bintou suggests: “... it was very difficult having to leave them behind. It’s difficult”. Whatever choices the women said they had made about living apart from their children, separation was always constructed as a difficult decision, endured rather than embraced.

Reinforcing the tenacious link between women and children that ultimately upholds a gendered order of society with “good mothers” as child-centred and emotionally involved with their children (Hays, 1996; Lockwood, 2013), a major preoccupation for some of the women was to defend themselves against being seen as bad mothers (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013). The limited storylines which exist in relation to good mothering narratives are narrowly defined and as Gustafson (2005: 1) reminds us “few mothers are more stigmatised than those living apart from their children”. However, what constitutes good mothering may be constructed differently by women seeking asylum. A number of the women spoke about how they had sought to secure their children’s survival. For Precious, leaving her children was a safer option for the children than bringing them. Queenie also suggested that her son’s safety was of primary concern: “It was awful, really awful, and I was getting scared for my son... just feeling he is safe outweighs all this” (Queenie). Emphasizing how they had faced uncertain and dangerous journeys to seek asylum, a number of women presented themselves as protectors of their children. The decision not to bring their children on asylum journeys was constructed as a way to protect and minimize potential harm to their children.

A number of the women suggested their lives were further complicated and they had to make choices between their children. Striving to make sense of their decisions, some women discussed why they had

brought one or two of their children with them on asylum journeys, leaving other children behind. For Love, the process of deciding which child/ren to bring and which child/ren to leave was primarily explained by the constraints of her financial situation: "... because of the amount of money I had, I couldn't get both children. I brought one and I left the other". Establishing that finances influenced the decision, Love indicates the logic of her decision given the practical restraints she had faced. Bintou outlined that it was not a choice: "I am not able to bring the five of them so I ran away with the two". Her rationale for bringing two children emphasized the risks posed by leaving the oldest boy and the issue of treating girls and boys equally:

I brought the eldest son and the eldest daughter, because I had two boys and two girls and then a boy... in our culture they target the first born and if they don't get to the mum then they get to the first born boy. So to be fair I could not bring two boys and leave two girls there so I bring the first boy and the eldest girl. That's what I did. (Bintou)

The women's choices were limited and often difficult, but emotional care and consideration for their children was underlined. Whilst Naomi said she had to do things quickly, she also spoke about how she had made plans and explained the preparation that went into protecting her children: "I started preparing and saving money to move away and I had to take my children away and hide them somewhere". Talking about the potential risks to her children, financial considerations and the practicalities of hiding her children, Naomi said she had made preparations for the time when they would live apart.

Descriptions of preparation were important to the women's stories about "good mothering". Many of the women talked of the plans they had put in place that fulfilled their responsibilities as "good mothers" (Kielty, 2008; Lockwood, 2013). This included identifying other-mothers (Collins, 2000), in the form of grandmothers and other close female relatives, to care for their children. Living apart from their children (or some of their children), maternal nurture was considered a vital component for child well-being and some women said they had placed their children in the care of close female family members who they felt they could trust (Collins, 2000). Precious talked about leaving her children in the

care of her younger sister and the extended family. Queenie gave a detailed description of how she had left her son with his devoted maternal grandmother. Maximizing their stories of extended family connections highlighted the ways their children were cared for and loved by large, cohesive families (Falicov, 2007) and defended against the women being seen as bad mothers.

Constructing themselves as resilient women who could meet the challenges of living apart, some women also claimed they maintained a mothering role (Falicov, 2007). Lucy said she made frequent contact with her daughters through emails, phone calls, text messages and letters. Queenie suggested: “I ring and write whenever I can”. It took a great deal of endurance to maintain their mothering roles and sustain their bonds with their children. Particularly difficult was the danger that women felt they might put their children in, or the people who were looking after their children. For Jen, this meant that she sustained contact with her children covertly: “... don’t tell anybody you talked to your mum”. While many of the women highlighted their efforts to ensure their contact with their children, it was particularly difficult for women to reconcile the constraints and complexities in which their lives have been restricted and the elements that are beyond their control.

4. The Narrative of Ruination

Standing in some contrast to the narratives of resistance, reworking and resilience, the narrative of ruination illustrates the diminishment of women’s lives. Forming the basis of an exploration of the discontinuity of self and consistent with the chaos narrative (Frank, 1995), the narrative of ruination is used to highlight the precarity of women’s lives and the ways in which their sense of self is fundamentally threatened (Langer, 1991). These were inevitably difficult stories to hear, and whilst I may have wished to find some hope in the women’s stories, a number of women resisted any attempts to reach a “comforting conclusion” (Langer, 1991: 69). Used to illustrate the ways some women struggle to (re)claim a story, the narrative of ruination exposes the inadequacy of dominant narratives. Delimiting (some) women’s stories, the dominance of available narratives does not accommodate the complexities and contradictions of the lives of women seeking asylum and the inadequacy of

existing narratives leave some women narratively “shipwrecked” (Frank, 1995).

Diminishment

The stories of women seeking asylum are often restricted to responding to the expectations and requirements of others. This is particularly pronounced when the asylum system demands that a woman establish her identity as a victim in order to be granted legal protection (Kea and Roberts-Holmes, 2013; Shuman and Bohmer, 2014). Some of the women were unable to construct a story that reconciles seeking asylum and being recognized as a genuine refugee. Whilst these storytellers constructed a sense of their own agency, this often emerged from a position of relative powerlessness. Unlike the narrative of reworking, the construction of the genuine refugee is impeded through stories of being identified as a liar and disbelieved by people in positions of power. Being identified as a “liar” was deeply problematic for a number of the women. As Plummer (1995: 167) suggests “...victims know only too well the frequent charge that they are simply making up their stories” and similarly, women seeking asylum are also frequently accused of simply making up their stories. Several of the women said they had been called liars by the Judge or Home Office caseowner:

... they don't believe me. I am liar. I am this. I am that... Everything I tell them they don't believe me. (Diane)

... when we went to court, yes the judge he called me a liar... (Bintou)

... he write it on my immigration statement that she is lying... he wouldn't listen to me as a woman seeking asylum. (May)

... she [Home Office] started screaming at me, it's rubbish what I'm telling her... it's lies... (Lucy)

Some of the women said these accusations had led to problems with being granted asylum. A number of women had been refused asylum as a result of being disbelieved in their asylum accounts. This was seen by some as a powerful rejection and dismissal that signaled a lack of

hope. Diane suggested the Home Office refusal to grant her asylum had a devastating effect on her life:

I came here for help. If they don't want to help me they have to explain why me... everybody is like me is asylum you know. If they don't help, why just every time my life they send me miserable letters. If I open it every time they refuse, refuse. (Diane)

Unlike the narrative of resilience, which illustrated the different ways women survive and endure in the face of great adversity, the narrative of ruination emphasizes their sense of utter powerlessness and abandonment.

... they [Home Office] came with a refusal and they said my claim has been abandoned... that case has been abandoned... the appeal has been abandoned... all abandoned. (Bintou)

Whilst stories of “good mothering” (highlighted through the narrative of resilience) often provided a sense of purpose, equally the narrative of ruination illustrates repeated threats to mothering identities. Such stories incorporate negative feelings of impending death. For example, the diminished possibilities of the future and the precarious situation of her children's future were concerns of Bintou. Precious also suggested she was going to die and her grave concerns for her children:

... they refused me and it was hard... what am I going to do now? The next thing is like I'm going to die and then if I'm going to die, what is going to happen to my kids? What is it going to happen to my children? (Precious)

Constructing the refusal of her asylum claim and the consequences of the negative decision as an irreparable disruption and utter dismissal, Diane said she could see no way forward with her life. The ever-present risk of removal from the UK was an unbearable anticipated future in Diane's story:

So many times, you don't believe me I was just trying to kill myself. Many, many times. But I didn't die. I don't know. I did it very hard to die because it was too much for me... I been on tribunal court and they

refused me... He [the Judge] say “Your case is dismissed. You are not allowed to do anything in this country. As soon as possible you have to leave.” (Diane)

By casting doubt on her asylum story, the pivotal point of refusal revoked any hope for Diane. Shrouded in stories of dismissal and rejection, several of the women dismiss any possible hope that claiming asylum might have provided.

Being a victim is a prerequisite for being granted asylum, but for some women this proves to be an inadequate framework within which to tell their stories of persecution and asylum. Those who had been refused asylum or disbelieved alluded to their disconnection to this narrative and such frameworks prove inadequate for some women. Z suggested her skepticism about whether she could be understood: “... you see yourself you do not belong... you feel that you will not be understood by other people”. Whilst Frank (1995) has argued that stories can heal and that wounded storytellers are engaged in recovering their voices, the narrative of ruination defies any sort of healing. Constrained by despair and diminishment, the narrative of ruination does not offer the comfort and protection of resistance. Exposing the inadequacy of dominant narratives, the narrative of ruination illustrates the limitation of dominant narratives and many of the women struggled to speak about events and situations.

Conclusion

The concepts of international protection and fundamental human rights to be universally protected are enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention. Constructed around the concept of the male political refugee, gender-based persecution was omitted as a determining factor for receiving refugee status and the stories of women refugees have been largely ignored, overlooked and marginalized. However, stories about women seeking asylum in the 21st century have changed. The pervasiveness of political, legal and public debates has led to people seeking asylum increasingly storied as “hate figures” and women seeking asylum being understood as “female victims”, bereft of capacity and unendingly victimized. The dominance of

these narratives means that women seeking asylum may find themselves vilified and dehumanized by the stories they come to tell – or that others tell about them.

This paper contributes to the fields of feminist, narrative, and resistance studies by suggesting that research processes can seek to challenge the formation of narratives which come to dominate at the expense of all other stories that could be told. Taking a feminist narrative approach, I suggest there is an opportunity to add to different and diverse understanding of women's lives. The paper also contributes to insights about how and why we might use narrative methods to explore women's lives and demonstrates how stories and narrative frameworks that inform the stories women tell can be constraining as well as potentially liberating. Indeed, it has been my intention to include and highlight some of the ways in which women seeking asylum negotiate, circumvent and resist dominant narratives in their own storytelling. As this research has identified, narrative frameworks can offer meaning, facilitating the construction of a positive sense of self, and even in the most limiting environments women are able to tell stories that resist problematic identities and dehumanizing narratives. However, focused on the diverse and intersecting lives of women seeking asylum, this paper is not simply a celebration of women's stories. Acknowledging the role of dominant narratives, I raise awareness of some of the limitations of reinforcing those dominant stories that can delimit women's lives.

Developing four narrative analytical frameworks to make sense of how and why women tell their stories, this paper offers a critical theoretical engagement with the concepts of resistance and ruination. Drawing on the narrative of resistance, the research suggests that some women tell stories of challenge. Resisting the narrative of the "political refugee" as "male" and the passivity of the "female victim", some of the women suggest they are political subjects and protagonists involved in consciousness-building and oppositional activities and agendas. In this context, these stories challenge us to recognize women as agentic. Drawing on the narrative of reworking, the research explores some of the ways in which a number of women's stories of change highlight their indirect resistance. Constructing positive self-meanings, some women attempt to change and negotiate the identity of being an asylum seeker or

claim their own legitimacy through stories of persecution. Drawing on the narrative of resilience, the research emphasizes that some women tell stories about the different ways they survive and endure living apart from their children, calling attention to the difficulties and pain of their situations. These stories illustrated their agency but also restricted them from emerging as a subject with their own needs beyond those associated with good mothering.

Delimiting women's possibilities for making sense of their experiences, dominant narratives directed some women to construct themselves as diminished and a number of women were "narratively shipwrecked" (Frank, 1995). Bringing awareness to the inadequacy and limitations of narratives told about women seeking asylum, a number of women explored the discontinuity of self and the precarity of women's lives. These stories suggest that some women are constrained by responding to the expectations and requirements of others, including those in a position of power making judgments on their asylum claims. Drawing on the narrative of ruination exposes the inadequacy of dominant narratives which do not accommodate some of the complexities and contradictions of women's lives. Whilst the narratives of resistance, reworking and resilience may reassure the listener, the narrative of ruination is a powerful story that challenges the listener to abandon orderly responses, placing a compelling responsibility on the listener. Important in helping us appreciate our own (potentially privileged) situations, the narrative of ruination may also challenge us to be transformed and compelled to use our capacities and activism.

Contributing to the fields of feminist and narrative research within the context of resistance studies and practices, the analysis opens up a critical space that highlights the importance of narrative forms of resistance and consequently enriches our understanding of the diversity of forms of feminized resistance. Where women's lives and sense of self could not be expressed within available narrative frameworks and they struggled to speak about events and situations, this research emphasizes how and why some women might be constrained and limited by dominant narratives. When we research women's lives, it is an imperative to be aware of the social, political and historical contexts that form the basis of dominant narrative frameworks. These particular contexts shape the

stories that are available and can be used to make sense of women's lives, but they also constrain and delimit (some) women. Listening to women's stories, and asking why and how women might tell the stories they do, can create new and different narratives which accommodate some of the complexities and contradictions of women's lives. In researching women's lives, there is an opportunity to contribute to a greater understanding of the diversity of those lives. New narrative frameworks open up the possibilities for women to tell their own stories and women seeking asylum are already shifting, expanding, and transforming the frameworks of our times through the narratives of resistance, reworking, resilience and ruination.

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Unemployed Workers' Movements and the Territory of Social Reproduction¹

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Abstract

Unemployment soared in Argentina when the country fell into economic crisis in the late 1990s. Amid these dire circumstances, women took the lead in organizing resistance to the neoliberal policies that had caused the crisis, as well as in developing everyday alternative practices that would allow thousands of people to survive the crisis without support from the state. Out of these actions the unemployed workers' movements were formed, which became well-known for organizing large roadblocks on major highways across the country and for creating alternative economic practices. Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork, this paper examines the role of women in the unemployed workers' movements of the urban periphery in Buenos Aires. It argues that one of the movement's main achievements was politicizing and making visible issues of social reproduction. The paper shows how organizing around social reproduction involves a new spatiality of struggle – privileging spaces of everyday life in the neighborhood – and a form of politics that prioritizes creating new social relations and increasing democratic control over everyday life. The paper goes on to explore the alternative economic practices and autonomous forms of social reproduction created by the unemployed workers' movements in the territories in which they operate.

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Introduction

The roadblocks... they were massive. On one end were the burning tires, huge piles of them to stop traffic from passing, and we were ready, with sticks, ready for repression. But it was not just this, there was also the cooking and eating together, sitting around the fire playing guitar and singing... There were children too, we took care of them together; there was a medical tent in case someone was injured. We took care of everything ourselves. In reality, we were finding another way of living together. (Interview, October, 2011, La Matanza)

These roadblocks were the unemployed's way of blocking the day-to-day functioning of capitalism, since they had been denied a workplace in which to strike. In small cities in rural Argentina, whole communities joined the roadblocks to protest layoffs after the privatization of the state-run oil company (Dinerstein, 2001; Dinerstein, Contartese, and Deledicque, 2010; Svampa and Pereyra, 2009).

In the peripheries of major cities, the unemployed began assembling in response to rising inflation and cuts to social services (Flores, 2005; Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano, 2002). Women were particularly affected by these neoliberal measures and often took the lead in organizing against them (Auyero, 2003). Roadblocks were extremely effective in forcing both local administrations and the federal government to provide aid to the poor and unemployed, including food assistance, new jobs programs, unemployment benefits and other social programs. The mobilized unemployed became known as *piqueteros* for this tactic and soon coalesced into more concrete organizations (Mazzeo, 2004; Svampa and Pereyra, 2009).

However, rather than understanding the unemployed workers' movements as either a less effective labor movement or as a *new social movement* in opposition to the labor movement, I argue that the unemployed workers' organizations still focus on labor but expand their definition of labor to include social reproduction. Dinerstein has challenged the idea that the struggles of the unemployed are reactive and defensive, showing that they make three contributions: 1) constituting "a labour collective and an identity of resistance that also challenged many of the

assumptions and practices of the labour movement” (2014: 1040); 2) “implementing cooperative and productive projects in the communities and neighbourhoods” (1043); and 3) influencing state policy (1044). Here I focus on how the unemployed workers’ movements organized around social reproduction to demonstrate how politicizing reproductive labor marks a feminization of resistance, simultaneously addressing the roots of women’s subordination and challenging the reproduction of capitalism itself.

This article takes the perspective of social reproduction to show not only how women were particularly affected by neoliberal structural adjustment and austerity measures, but also how their participation and leadership shaped the unemployed workers’ movements. I will show how these movements politicized reproductive labor by making it visible and actively organizing around issues related to reproduction, such as hunger, healthcare, housing, and education. I will then analyze how organizing around reproduction, and the key role of women in doing so, implies a different sense of *the political*, which decenters the spaces and institutions of the state in order to privilege *territorial organizing* in the spaces of everyday life. Next, I turn to the alternative economic practices and autonomous forms of social reproduction created by unemployed workers’ movements to show how these organizations created practices that privilege the reproduction of material life over the reproduction of capital. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork carried out in various intervals between 2005 and 2013 with two different *Movimientos de Trabajadores Desocupados* (Unemployed Workers’ Movements) or MTDs² in the urban periphery of Buenos Aires. The fieldwork included participant observation in many of the movement’s events and spaces, as well as semi-structured interviews with organizers and participants in the unemployed workers’ movements. I also analyze the organizations’ writ-

² While numerous organizations of the unemployed emerged during this period in Argentina, my focus here is specifically on the so called MTDs: the more autonomous organizations of the unemployed, which largely remained independent from trade unions and political parties, and thus were able to more fully develop a new form of politics. For more on the histories and trajectories of different unemployed workers’ movements and organizations across Argentina, see Svampa and Pereyra (2009) and Dinerstein (2003).

ings and theoretical production, recognizing that self-reflective knowledge production is a fundamental element of this new form of politics (Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, 2008; Motta and Esteves, 2014).

Feminization of Resistance

Various authors have noted that recent social movements exhibit a “feminization of resistance”, “reconfiguring and reimagining the nature, meaning, and subjects of political resistance and social transformation” (Motta, 2013: 36). This feminization of resistance goes beyond a quantitative increase in women’s participation and leadership in social movements or the increasing visibility of women’s issues to imply a qualitative difference in how resistance takes shape. Among other elements, the feminization of resistance entails challenging the traditional divisions between the public and private spheres, politicizing the “personal”, and shifting emphasis onto bodies and the everyday activities of social reproduction (Fernandes, 2007; Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015; Motta, 2013; Sutton, 2007).

On the one hand, the feminization of resistance is related to the corresponding “feminization of poverty” under neoliberalism, in which the increasing informalization of labor and breakdown of survival strategies for the poor means that “the place of popular struggle has shifted from the formal world of work to the community” (Motta, 2013: 36). Since “women are at the heart of the community, they become central actors in these new forms of popular politics” (Ibid.). However, this feminization of resistance is not only a reaction to the ills of neoliberalism, but is also the result of decades of women’s struggles to recognize domestic labor and other reproductive tasks, to challenge machismo and discrimination within trade unions and Leftist political parties, and to defy the hierarchies and sexism inherent within the state institutions. Women have long sought to include the sphere of personal relationships in political struggle along with the everyday reproductive labor necessary to sustain and build a movement, from feeding participants to providing safeguards against burnout (Federici, 2012; James, 2012). They have also critiqued the gendered division of labor within movements: how certain forms of care work are undervalued and assumed to be women’s responsibility, while men engage in what is typically considered “political” work:

decision-making, public actions, speaking, etc. (Fernandes, 2007). Thus, the feminization of resistance should not only be understood as a reactive response to shifts in capital, but also a proactive strategy of women to push their position to the forefront of anti-capitalist struggles.

Thus, the feminization of resistance becomes an important element in how many movements, especially in Latin America, are attempting to redefine the political. Gutiérrez Aguilar alternates between the terms “non-state-centric politics” and “politics in feminine” to describe this reconfiguration. She argues that non-state-centric politics:

does not propose confrontation with the state as the central issue nor is it oriented by building strategies for its “occupation” or “takeover;” but rather, basically, it is entrenched in the defense of the common, it displaces the state and capital’s capacities of control, and pluralizes and expands multiple social capacities of intervention and decision-making about public affairs: it disperses power as it enables the reappropriation of language and collective decision-making about issues that are incumbent to all because they affect all of us. (2015: 89)

Gutiérrez insists that this is a politics in feminine because

its main axis and heart is the reproduction of material life, the traditional focus of feminine activity, not exclusive, but crucial and as its expansive and subversive quality is based in the possibility of including and articulating human creativity and activity for autonomous ends. (Ibid.: 88–89)

In other words, this new form of politics is defined both by the rejection of the centrality of the state and a re-centering of issues related to reproduction, care, and the common.

In this paper, I will explore one specific aspect of the feminization of resistance: the politicization of social reproduction. Feminist Marxists have long sought to highlight the central role that reproductive labor plays in the capitalist system by directly producing the commodity labor power (Dalla Costa and James, 1972).³ Marx discussed social reproduc-

³ For an overview of this debate within Marxian and feminist politics, see Chap-

tion as the activities and structures that reproduce the capitalist class relation from one generation to the next, thus ensuring the reproduction of capital itself. On the other hand, a feminist perspective defines social reproduction as the “complex of activities and services that reproduce human beings as well as the commodity labor power, starting with child-care, housework, sex work and elder care, both in the form of waged and unwaged labour” (Barbagallo and Federici, 2012: 1). These activities include

household cleaning, shopping, preparing food, doing the laundry, paying the bills, providing intimacy and emotional support, such as listening and consoling; bearing children, teaching and disciplining them are also an important part of reproductive work. We must add the unnamed, unnamable labor required to anticipate, prevent or resolve crises, keep up good relations with kin and neighbours, coping with the growing threats to our health – through the food we eat, the water we drink. (Ibid.: 4)

Beyond the tasks that traditionally make up concepts of domestic work and biological reproduction, this definition includes the affective labor of creating and maintaining social relations that are at the heart of capitalist production today (Hardt and Negri, 2009). These are the activities that allow for the reproduction of human life, of labor power, of the bios, but also the territory and the community.

Federici compares the Marxian conception of reproduction to the one developed in feminist struggles:

While the feminist concept of “reproduction” may appear to be a more modest category when compared to the Marxian one, the opposite is true. For Marx, “reproduction” was the process by which capital accumulates itself. In contrast, feminists conceive of “reproduction” as the process that reproduces both the true makers of capitalist accumulation and the struggle against it. (2016: 365)

In other words, reproduction refers to how the capitalist relation is

ter 3 of Kathi Weeks' *The Problem with Work* (2011).

reproduced, but also the moment when different social relations can be produced. In Marxian terms, social reproduction refers to the biological reproduction of the labor force as well as the reproduction of the capitalist social relation. Yet the feminist reading of social reproduction opens the door for autonomous forms of social reproduction that allow the working class to ensure its own material reproduction, as well as to create non-capitalist social relations. As it is this separation from the means of their own reproduction that forces the working class to sell their labor and enter into the capitalist relation, reclaiming control over social reproduction is a key element of any sustainable anti-capitalist struggle (Caffentzis, 2010). Furthermore, the devaluing of social reproduction is one of the many causes of women's subordinate position in contemporary capitalist societies (Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Federici, 2004).

Despite its key role, the sphere of social reproduction has often been ignored both by academics studying labor and social movements and by labor and political movement leaders (Barbagallo and Federici, 2012; Federici, 2012). However, recently movements around the world have begun to actively focus on issues related to social reproduction. Zechner and Rubner Hansen (2016) show how many contemporary social movements are organizing around reproduction and argue that struggles around social reproduction are important for building power, and take place across four levels: “at the level of social relations of care, at the level of spaces and inhabiting, at the level of production and distribution of resources, and at the level of institutions”. They argue:

By building autonomous circuits of self-reproduction, such struggles ensure the collective power needed to sustain a fight for change. Being able to temporarily opt out of dominant forms of access to resources – be it via labor strikes, road blocks or boycotts – generates a huge increase in collective bargaining and blockading power. These are powerful antagonistic or agonistic agents vis-à-vis the state and market because, by allowing people to partially withdraw from hegemonic circuits of self-reproduction, they provide the basis of an actual oppositional power.

Building on this argument, in the remainder of this paper I will discuss the unemployed workers' movements' contributions to politicizing social reproduction, as well as creating autonomous forms of reproduction. In doing so, I hope to highlight how the unemployed workers' movements build on past labor movements, but with a significant expansion of the concept of labor to include reproductive labor, which has allowed them to challenge women's subordination and prevailing gender relations.

Crisis of Social Reproduction

During the period of neoliberal structural adjustment in the 1990s, women faced an increased burden as the social safety net provided by the state was greatly reduced by austerity measures. As the state withdrew from its role in ensuring social reproduction, cutting spending on health care, education, unemployment benefits and general aid to the poor, women were forced to pick up the extra costs in order to protect their families. Dalla Costa understands neoliberalism in this way as a process which:

Further sacrificed the sphere of reproduction to that of production, and has therefore underdeveloped reproduction in order to further develop production. This led to the disappearance of individual and collective rights achieved through hard struggle in the preceding decades, and to the withdrawal of resources available for the pursuit of a life that would not be 'all work' in a context of increasing precarity and uncertainty. (2008: 30)

This extra work is added to the generally unwaged and unrecognized labor that women already carried out, especially in peripheral neighborhoods in which the state often does not provide basic services (such as running water and sewage). Nagar et al. also note how structural adjustment disproportionately affects women:

Neoliberal states are subsidized through the informal provision of housing, food, health care, and education. As neoliberal states withdraw from the provision of social services, this work is most often assumed by women in the feminized spheres of household and community. (2002: 261)

In other words, women take on extra work to make up for the state's withdrawal in this role.

The state's withdrawal from social reproduction, along with the crisis in formal labor, led to what can be understood as a crisis in social reproduction. The neoliberal austerity measures of the 1990s were a direct attack on the popular sectors' ability to reproduce themselves. Pérez Orozco defines the crisis in social reproduction as "the increasing difficulties for putting forth the conditions that make it possible to fulfill the material, affective, and relational expectations of reproduction" (2014: 189). She continues,

These troubles do not attack all of the social body; there are groups that manage to impose their lives as those that deserve to be rescued and satisfy their elitist and individualist aspirations. We can characterize the crisis of social reproduction in terms of three connected processes: the general increase in vital precarity, the proliferation of situations of exclusion, and the multiplication of social inequalities to the point of being able to speak of a process of social hypersegregation. (Ibid.)

Pérez Orozco recognizes this crisis of social reproduction as a key feature of the 2008 financial crisis in Europe, as well as of economic crises around the world, demonstrating how economic crises particularly affect women.

In Argentina, this crisis of social reproduction was largely manifested through increasing inflation that caused the prices of utilities and basic goods to skyrocket. As previously nationalized industries were privatized and private investors began pulling out of the country due to currency instability and international market crashes, there was initially an increase in self-employment and informal sector employment, but as the economic crisis worsened, those possibilities dried up as well (Gago, 2014), making it increasingly difficult for women to obtain any type of employment. Along with drastic increases in food prices and utility rates, the partial privatization of healthcare and education effectively gave rise to a two-tiered system in which the wealthy used private services, while the poor were stuck with greatly underfunded public services. Women especially suffered from these measures since they are usually respon-

sible for shopping and cooking food, ensuring that household expenses and utilities are paid, taking care of children, and coordinating the family's healthcare needs.

However, while neoliberalism has particularly affected women, especially poor and non-white women, these women are not passive victims in the face of an ever more powerful abstract neoliberal force, but have proven to be one of the strongest sources of resistance to neoliberalism (Fernandes, 2007; Motta, 2013; Sutton, 2007). The networks created by women to feed their families and provide for their basic needs, for example through community meals and barter networks, laid the groundwork for the establishment of unemployed workers' movements in urban areas and were able to effectively meet people's basic needs, allowing them to survive the worst times of neoliberalism and crisis (Svampa and Pereyra, 2009; Zibechi, 2003). Besides the directly productive activities of women in these networks (starting micro-enterprises in their homes, for example), they also carried out the essential affective labor of creating the social relationships based on solidarity that allowed people to support one another, establishing the basis for the eventual movements and organizations that would emerge out of their struggles.

Making Social Reproduction Visible

In response to this crisis of social reproduction, the women's first concern was to take care of their families and communities. Women took the lead in organizing *ollas populares*, communal meals where everyone contributed what they could and ate what they needed. These meals took place in public spaces, plazas or street corners, bringing the issue of hunger into the public eye, and sometimes were confrontational, blocking streets or local government buildings. Thus, the *ollas populares* simultaneously served two purposes: first, they were an immediate and direct solution to the problem of hunger; second, they served to bring the issue of hunger, and of social reproduction more generally, into the public sphere. These questions, of putting enough food on the table, paying bills, making house repairs, and dealing with medical issues, are usually considered *private* and *personal*, the responsibility of each individual family unit. By cooking and distributing food in *public* spaces, organizers challenged this relegation of issues of social reproduction and brought them into the public discussion, in other words, *politicizing social reproduction*.

The piquetes continued this work of politicizing and making visible the labor of social reproduction. While most clearly a protest about unemployment, demanding jobs and/or unemployment subsidies, the piquetes also served to increase visibility of reproductive labor. Besides protests, the piquetes were encampments in the middle of the highways, spaces where people lived out their everyday lives. Thus, the piquetes were forms of experimentation with collective life: community meals, health care and medical aid, popular education, varied cultural activities, and the common production of subjectivity. These commoning practices were as important as the disruptive element of the protests, by both encouraging a broader range of participation and allowing the piquetes to persist by providing people with the material and emotional support needed to camp out on the road for extended periods of time. Organizers, many of whom were women, clearly valued this activity and prioritized it when coordinating the piquetes. Women were at the forefront of organizing piquetes and other protests of the unemployed because their responsibilities of caring were in crisis, and because their ways of relating to one another and working collectively would sow the seeds of the solution to the crisis. Women were less likely to be represented by labor unions, but had developed other less formal ways of supporting each other – networks for exchanging goods and caring for each other – that greatly impacted the form of organization adopted by the movements of the unemployed. Meanwhile, many men were left feeling shocked and uprooted by losing what they had considered to be life-time employment, upon which they based much of their sense of identity, friendships, and militancy. Svampa and Pereyra (2009) describe a crisis in masculinity brought about by cultural shifts but also rising levels of male unemployment in the 1990s that separated men from the work that was a crucial element of their identity and social ties. Many unemployed men were initially unwilling to organize, feeling shame, guilt, and impotency after losing their jobs (Auyero, 2003). One woman, an early member of the MTD La Matanza, describes how many responded to being laid off:

The men were embarrassed, they didn't want anyone to know they were not working, so they would stay inside all day, many started drinking... Meanwhile, us women had to go on providing for our families, we had

to eat, we didn't have time to go about being embarrassed or worrying about our pride... that's why we came together and started organizing. (Interview, November 11, 2011, La Matanza)

This initial organizing was aimed at meeting the basic needs of participants and other neighborhood residents through collective meals and other forms of mutual aid and support, recognizing that those needs would either be met collectively or not at all. It was later that these networks of care and support coalesced into unemployed workers' organizations in many of the country's urban areas.

These actions – the *ollas populares*, everyday life in the piquetes, women's visible role in organizing the unemployed workers' movements – served to *politicize* reproductive labor. First, they made issues of reproduction – hunger, unaffordable utility rates, inadequate healthcare and education – visible in the public eye and as common problems, not merely the responsibility of individual families. By carrying out the labor of social reproduction in public spaces in the middle of piquetes, the MTDs highlighted the importance of this labor and those who perform it. Demands related to obtaining food, lower utility rates, better healthcare and education, and unemployment benefits put issues regarding reproduction at the center of the debate around neoliberalism, highlighted the effect of structural adjustment on women, and posited these issues as collective social responsibilities, or in other words as political problems. Women's participation in the *ollas populares* and piquetes was important because it was a way for women to break out of the spaces to which they traditionally had been confined (the household and by extension the neighborhood) into the public spaces of plazas and highways. As one young woman who began participating in roadblocks at the age of sixteen describes,

the piquete was the first place where I experienced where people would listen to me, where I could be a leader. Before I thought my destiny would be to clean or cook for other people, I never saw that woman could take leadership in something that big like the piquetes. (Interview, Laferre, October 2011)

This effort to make struggles around social reproduction visible was one of the driving forces leading to a change in public policy to eventually garner more state support for reproductive activities (Garay, 2007). Additionally, using women's traditional activities as political tactics and carrying them out in public allowed more women to become politicized and actively assume leadership roles within organizations as a form of subversion, in, against, and beyond the traditional figure of woman as mother (Fernandes, 2007; Motta, 2013; Sutton, 2007). Their political actions also have a theoretical force: they challenge the division between the private and the public, in which activities of social reproduction are seen as *private*, both physically taking place in the private sphere of the home and a private matter to be resolved by the individual or family, in opposition to *public* matters, which are automatically considered political (McDowell, 1999). Additionally, this challenges the relegation of women's labor as unproductive or secondary.

New Form of Politics

As stated in the opening section, the unemployed workers' movements should be understood within the framework of a new *form of politics* characterized by the feminization of resistance. Gutiérrez Aguilar highlights how the feminization of politics, focusing on the material reproduction of everyday life, overturns the very meaning of the political:

The political, currently linked to the reproduction and general expansion of capital and as such always “political-economic,” is and can be time and time again defied from the multiple order of the material reproduction of social life *within, against and beyond* capital and its reproduction (2015: 132).

The movements of the unemployed formed part of a broader wave of social movements that emerged across Argentina in the late 1990s in opposition to neoliberal structural adjustment and austerity measures. In 2001, as the country fell even deeper into economic crisis, social unrest grew throughout the population and ultimately leading to an uprising on December 19th and 20th that forced the president out of office with the rallying cry, “*Que se vayan todos*” (They all must go), calling for the end of the neoliberal system and the entire class of politicians supporting it

(Barrientos and Isaía, 2011). Yet after the protests, rather than attempting to take over the state apparatus or to occupy the Casa Rosada, protesters returned to their neighborhoods where they began building alternatives in their everyday lives (MTD Solano, 2011). These movements did not seek representation or to occupy the institutions of government, but rather were concerned with creating forms of counter-power or popular power from below.⁴ This form of politics understands power as relational, as enacted in everyday interactions between people and in forms of governmentality that expand throughout the social field.⁵ These movements challenged the traditional forms of organizing practiced by political parties, labor unions, and other Leftist movements, which tended to understand power as residing in bodies of authority and focused exclusively on making demands to those bodies. Instead, they aimed to create new social relations, subjectivities and forms of life in the present, to build collective autonomy and control over daily life (Colectivo Situaciones, 2012; MTD de Solano, 2011).

As part of this new form of politics, the piquetero movement reimagined and reworked their own internal relationships by using assemblies and other non-hierarchical forms of decision-making (Sitrin, 2012). That is, piqueteros created decentralized and horizontal forms of organization and coordination, prioritized direct democracy in their own practices, and organized themselves in terms of the spaces and rhythms of everyday life. While internal hierarchies and divisions can often preclude the participation of women, youth, and racial or ethnic minorities, by promoting horizontal and democratic practices within the organizations the MTDs created spaces for more diverse participation. Women and youth were often at the forefront of the organizations of the unemployed, providing a stark contrast with male-dominated labor unions and

⁴ While other organizations of the unemployed who were affiliated with labor unions or political parties ultimately became incorporated into the Kirchner government, the MTDs remained independent. See the two appendices of Svampa and Pereyra's *Entre la ruta y el barrio* (2009) for more on the distinctions between different organizations of the unemployed and their relationship to the Kirchner government.

⁵ For more on the different understandings of power of different unemployed workers' organizations, see Colectivo Situaciones (2001) and Mazzeo (2011).

Peronist party organizations (Svampa and Pereyra, 2009; Zibechi, 2003). Again, this form of politics does not see politics as lying elsewhere but as something that is practiced in the everyday interactions between movement members.

By rejecting traditional forms of representational politics, the MTDs were not promoting a sort of anti-politics or apolitical organization. Rather, they were enacting a form of politics that is not centered on the institutions of the state, that does not assume that power operates only from above or that the path to social change lies in occupying institutions of power – a non-state-centric form of politics. This way of doing politics otherwise must be understood by looking at its effects in terms of the production of knowledge, meaning, social relations, and subjectivities. It could also be thought of in terms of micropolitics: “how we reproduce (or don’t) the dominant modes of subjectivation” (Guattari and Rolnik, 2005), which does not necessarily mean small scale, but rather recognizes that capitalism functions at the level of subjectivity and is reproduced as a social relation. Therefore, the MTD Solano emphasizes autonomy and horizontality in their project, not as dogmatic rules but as new forms of relating. As Neka Jara from the MTD elaborates: “Autonomy is not an established thing, it is the modification of certain logics of life, of internal and external relations” (MTD Solano, 2011: 196).

This commitment to creating new social relations, which are not determined by the market or capital-labor relations, permeates all aspects of the MTDs’ organization as they take their struggles beyond the workplace to the spaces of everyday life. Sitrin describes these experiences as “everyday revolutions”, referring to the wide range of movements that emerged around the period of 2001 in Argentina and prioritized the creation of new social relations in their struggles. She describes this “revolution of the everyday” as a combination of horizontality, self-management, sustenance projects, territorial practices, changing social relationships, affective politics, self-reflection, and autonomy (2012: 3–4). This recognition that politics takes place in the space of everyday activities, and refusing the separation of distinct realms of the social, the political, and the economic, is key to understanding the MTDs.

The political can be found in conflictual production of subjectivity, new social relations, and forms of life. As already mentioned, these struggles decenter the institutions of the state in the affirmation of a non-state-centric form of politics focused on building counter-power from below. Counter-power refers to a power from below that does not seek to become an institutionalized, hegemonic or centralized form of power, but rather to expand the popular capacity for intervention, the creation and affirmation of new values and forms of life (Colectivo Situaciones, 2001; Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano, 2002). Parallel to this notion of counter-power is the concept of autonomy, which is understood not only as independence from the institutions of the state and capital through the creation of alternative economic practices and forms of social organization, but also as an ontological autonomy to determine one's own values and desires. Autonomy thus requires going beyond the binary logic of the state to develop an autonomous form of thought and create one's own categories (Colectivo Situaciones, 2009). In terms of reproduction, autonomy thus refers to the material autonomy to be able to reproduce ourselves as people in relation to others, but also as the autonomy to determine how that reproduction takes place and what value is ascribed to that labor. Thus, this new form of politics explicitly turns social reproduction into a terrain of struggle, questioning what social relations are being reproduced and how, while privileging the creation of non-capitalist social relations. As will be discussed below, these non-capitalist social relations are founded on a connection to a concrete territory, and on communities and relationships based on cooperation rather than competition.

Territorial Organizing

This new form of politics and the politicization of social reproduction requires a shift in the spatiality of politics. Following the moment of rupture represented by the *piquetes* and December 2001 protests, many of the organizations of the unemployed decided to focus their efforts on organizing in the specific neighborhoods in which their members lived, creating new social relations, alternative economic practices, and autonomous forms of social reproduction in those territories (Svampa and Pereyra, 2009). By deciding to focus primarily on territorial organiz-

ing, the MTDs dedicated themselves to directly addressing the needs of neighborhood residents, without waiting for state intervention, first to survive the crisis and then to create new, collective ways of life.

This focus on territorial organizing is closely related to transformations in the spatial organization of labor, as well as the spatiality of reproductive labor. For people engaged in precarious and informal forms of labor, work is no longer the primary place of socialization, of building relations and community, is no longer the privileged site for political organizing. As one woman participating in the MTD La Matanza explained:

I work cleaning houses in the Capital, but I work alone, I don't see anyone there, that's not where I socialize, it's when I come back home, to the neighborhood, that's where my life is, that's why we fight to make the conditions better there, in the neighborhood, where we live. (Interview, April 23, 2012, La Matanza)

Without a consistently shared site of work, labor organizing cannot be limited to or centered around the workplace. It was with this in mind, and looking for new places from which to base their struggles, that the MTDs began organizing in the specific neighborhoods where members *lived*. It is in these neighborhoods where the most important work takes place: the labor of social reproduction. The MTDs themselves have recognized this transition with the popular slogan and organizing mantra, “The neighborhood is the new factory” (Mazzeo, 2004). This recognizes not only that production and labor are not limited to the factory, but also that struggles cannot be confined to the factory.

Thus, territorial organization can be seen as a way of expanding the struggle to produce new social relations outside the workplace and into the spaces of everyday life by establishing a physical presence in a given neighborhood or territory and seeking to collectively manage as many elements of daily life as possible. Territorial organization as practiced by the MTDs means organizing around the needs of community residents, including food, clean water, housing, education, and the desire to form community in neighborhoods that are socially and ethnically fragmented. The MTDs attempted to build on what they had won with the piquetes

by establishing more permanent spaces such as social centers, clinics and schools, as well as cooperative productive enterprises, which serve to house the movements' activities and meetings, and more generally as spaces of encounter, where movement participants can come together for any or no reason whatsoever. Through these spaces, the MTDs were able to build a presence and support in their territories, allowing them to better understand and intervene the most pressing issues to neighborhood residents. This territorial organization implies opening up all the spaces of daily activity to critique and as possible sites of organization (Zibechi, 2008). It also points to how these movements recognize and value the different types of labor that go into producing a territory by placing an emphasis on practices of care and education. In other words, the different social relations that these movements strive to create are embodied in the physical space they inhabit, just as capitalist social relations are also inscribed in spaces (Lefebvre, 1991).

The territorial work of the organizations of the unemployed is explicitly linked to the formation of new identities and subjectivities (Ferrara, 2003). Zibechi argues that a subject cannot exist without territory, and therefore capital works to deterritorialize. Zibechi locates the antecedents to the territorialization of the piquetero movement in the movement of land takeovers and squatter settlements of the 1980s. He goes further, however, by arguing that it is in the settlements where the beginnings of an autonomous working class culture is able to develop, as residents have more control over their spaces: they are not subject to formal property law or building codes, and thus construct their dwellings where and how they want to; they name their own streets; and in some cases residents even have their own forms of governance and justice (Zibechi, 2003: 164–165). This is what the MTDs aim to accomplish, little by little, as they wrestle control of territory from party politicians, state officials, and agents of capital in order to create spaces for the poor and unemployed to create their own forms of life based on solidarity and cooperation.

Delamata, looking specifically at the experience of the MTD Solano, explains the meaning of territorial organizing:

Carrying out territorial work in this case, not only means, to strengthen the collective's work in the local space, but rather, above all, attribute to the possibility of social change to these community activities. First, the work in the territory is proposed as the production of new values of solidarity that reconstitute interpersonal relations and the existential dimensions of people who have been broken by unemployment, poverty, and the forms of authoritarianism that permeate society in different ways. Secondly, this communitarian construction aims to produce a new society, that does not directly antagonize the places of constituted power in order to impose itself, but rather it projects itself and affirms itself as "non-state sovereignty." (2004: 48)

Territorial organizing is based on the fundamental recognition that power lies in the forms of life in the territory and therefore does not attempt to "scale-up" or privilege larger scale politics as being more effective forms of achieving social change. Above all, territorial organizing is based on a commitment to changing social relations in a particular place, attacking capitalist reproduction at its most fundamental level, and working to enact new social relations and subjectivities in that place. Thus, this shift to territorial organizing shows how the feminization of resistance and the politicization of social reproduction entails a *spatial* shift in organizing, opening up spaces that have been traditionally considered private or women's spaces to political struggle.

Alternative Economic Practices

As Argentina's economic crisis made the failures and limitations of the neoliberal capitalist system clear, both the need for and potential to create alternative economic practices became more apparent. The crisis of social reproduction discussed above made it necessary for the poor and unemployed, who could no longer rely on either formal employment or state support, to invent new forms of support. Many of the alternative economic practices began as informal practices of solidarity and mutual aid between neighbors, sharing food or even utilities and housing, in times of great need, such as the *ollas populares* previously discussed. These ad hoc, often spontaneous forms of support and mutual aid became increasingly organized when the rising rate of unemployment, both in

the formal and the informal sector, left more and more people without access to an income. In many cases, more formal organization was developed and the activities themselves adopted a more explicitly political character.

In this sense, these alternative economic practices, which emerged as survival mechanisms and became increasingly political, can be thought of as comprising a *solidarity economy*. Coraggio (2009) defines the solidarity economy as one that emphasizes use value and meeting the needs of its participants over exchange value and the accumulation of wealth. Acosta (2008) similarly emphasizes that the solidarity economy is one that is not ruled by the market or the state, but rather one in which solidarity is considered the basic economic value, and the market functions to reproduce solidarity, not the other way around. Along with worker-managed forms of production, the solidarity economy also refers to alternative forms of exchange and distribution, pricing mechanisms, and property arrangements (Giarracca and Massuh, 2008). This is similar to the eco-feminist approach taken by Pérez Orozco that argues for economies that put sustaining life – both human and non-human – at their center, rather than the reproduction of markets. These different ways of theorizing the solidarity economy ultimately point to the creation of practices that put the reproduction of life over the reproduction of capital, thus making reproduction a crucial terrain of struggle.

The MTD Solano makes a similar argument, defining its vision of an alternative economy as one that creates common and communitarian forms of life, in which meeting participants' basic needs comes before the question of how much profit different enterprises generate (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano, 2002). In other words, the MTD's objectives are not merely to autonomously produce economic wealth, but also to challenge notions of value that place individual economic wealth over collective economic and social well-being.

Toward this end, many of the unemployed workers' movements started their own worker-managed or cooperative enterprises. Along with providing some amount of income to movement members, cooperatives also aimed to create ways of working otherwise, to provide work with dignity. The self-managed productive enterprises are usually

organized as cooperatives, where workers or the organization as a whole collectively own the means of production, emphasizing workplace democracy, non-hierarchical forms of internal organization, and the just distribution of surplus. All decisions regarding production, distribution, pay, and internal organization are taken collectively by workers in assemblies. This does require that more of workers' time and energy goes into administration and management, but it also means that those decisions become politicized. Additionally, this challenges the division between intellectual and manual labor, as does rotating specific tasks (Matonte, 2010). Rotating tasks helps ensure that hierarchies do not develop within the enterprise, even informal hierarchies based on skills and knowledges. For this reason, the cooperatives also tend to emphasize internal skills training and knowledge-sharing about all aspects of the enterprise, as well as the politics of worker self-management and cooperativism.

According to Flores of the MTD La Matanza, "cooperation not only represented an economic response to the needs of life, but was also the organizational form that we found to break with isolation and to counteract the politics of neoliberal individualism predominant in our society" (2005: 36). He discusses how self-management and cooperativism allow the movement to resolve issues of daily life by providing for basic needs, but also, and more importantly, they help the movement strengthen its organization to be able to more effectively confront capital. Flores continues, "for us, since then, [cooperativism] became a form of life" (Ibid.). He sees cooperativism and self-management as "spaces for the construction of a double power... where the transitional work of 'workers' control' takes place" (Ibid.). The MTD's interest in cooperativism was not without critiques, however. Flores criticizes what he refers to as "business cooperatives" for being organized too much like capitalist businesses and becoming another way of appropriating workers' efforts. Therefore, before starting their cooperatives MTD members studied cooperativism, especially focusing on the experiences in the Zapatista territories in Chiapas and the landless movements in Brazil (Ibid.: 35). The fundamental element of these cooperatives, according to Flores, was that "they were built as tools for the social movement, and, therefore, had a qualitatively different character" (Ibid.).

These educational experiences served as the basis from which the MTD La Matanza was able to begin their own cooperative project. They started their first cooperative soon after occupying an abandoned school premise in the neighborhood of La Juanita, a small textile workshop. Various group members were already doing sewing work out of their homes using their own machines. On top of these machines they already owned, the MTD was able to purchase more sewing machines and equipment from a small grant from the Swiss Embassy. The cooperative initially employed six women, members of the MTD who were without work and had prior sewing/textile-work experience. The MTD also operates a cooperative bakery based on the same model. Originally paying all workers an equal salary, the cooperative's assembly later decided to take other factors into account, such as seniority and need, in determining pay rates as the cooperative grew to incorporate more workers. The important thing, workers expressed, is that these decisions are made openly, in assemblies, where all the workers are able to express their concerns and opinions, and they come to agreement over the final decision. Therefore, rather than a way of controlling and exploiting workers, the wage becomes a form of ensuring the community's continued reproduction.

One of the textile cooperative's most successful projects has been its ongoing collaboration with fashion designer Martín Churba. Describing his relationship with the MTD, Churba states, "I can't even say that I'm giving them work, I'm giving them a space where they develop their own capacities" (2007: 237). In their largest collaboration, the MTD's cooperative produced 1,500 fashion *guardapolvos* (the white coat traditionally worn as a school uniform), which were mostly exported. Rather than Churba making the designs on his own while the MTD's workers carried out the manual labor, the entire production process was collaborative. Movement members participated in the *guardapolvo* design, with Churba and his employees taking the time to work with the MTD not only to train workers in the cooperative but also to incorporate their ideas into the production. The project was immensely successful: it created decently paid employment for a number of MTD members, it generated a profit for the cooperative, which was used to expand the sewing workshop and support the MTD's other activities, and visibility from the

project helped the MTD build connections for other projects. Following the *guardapolvo* project, the MTD's cooperative made uniforms for other companies, including a few recuperated factories, as well as bags and t-shirts for other social organizations.

Perhaps more important than the material production that takes place in these cooperatives is the production of new social relations and subjectivities as workers learn to collectively manage their own activities without relying on an external authority and overcoming feelings of guilt and unworthiness from being unemployed (Flores, 2005). The MTD La Matanza discusses their cooperatives as not only an alternative method of organizing the economy, but also of organizing society, thus refusing to accept the separation of the economic from the social. The goal of cooperativism is “to try to construct through the basis of cooperation another culture, another subjectivity, other social relations, really another society” (Ibid.: 100). Thus, within the politicization of social reproduction, these cooperative enterprises play an important role on at least two levels: first, they provide some sort of income enabling the material reproduction of the unemployed, and second, they are part of a process of the creation of new (horizontal, non-capitalist) social relations. Additionally, by making decisions in assemblies and rotating tasks, the cooperatives challenge traditional gendered divisions of labor wherein women are relegated to more menial tasks on the lower end of hierarchies. Assemblies do not merely overturn traditional workplace hierarchies, for example, allowing women to be bosses, but seek to abolish those hierarchies altogether, creating a format in which all workers participate equally and fully in decision-making and are not managed or controlled by others.

Autonomous Social Reproduction

The MTDs' decision to return to the neighborhood and focus on territorial organizing fundamentally involved the creation of new ways of organizing and sustaining daily life through autonomous forms of social reproduction. This serves two purposes: to enable the poor and unemployed, those excluded from waged labor, to survive, and to create the material foundation of a counter-power from below. Rather than merely taking over what should be state responsibilities and thus serving as an

apology for the neoliberal state as some critics have argued, these autonomous projects recognize that it is in these actions of social reproduction that relations of dominance are produced and where they can be challenged. While there are many facets of social reproduction, here I will focus on concrete examples from the MTD La Matanza, as well as the MTD Solano. These brief descriptive accounts will shed light on what it means to focus on reproduction in practice, and the important impacts of these projects for participants.

MTD La Matanza: Education and Childcare

A focus on study and education at all ages and levels has been a key component of the MTD La Matanza's political activity since the early days of the organization. This emphasis came after the difficulties of self-management and in sustaining an autonomous movement in general demonstrated that capitalist values were much more deeply ingrained than they had previously imagined (Flores, 2005). Thus, focusing on education was seen as a way to directly create new values, to challenge masculinist and capitalist ways of knowing, and to create new relationships between all participants in the education experience (Motta and Esteves, 2014).

When the MTD La Matanza formed in 1996, one of their first activities was a reading group to study the economic and political transformations underway in Argentina, starting with readings that allowed them to understand the structural causes behind the increase in unemployment. Understanding unemployment as a structural issue was a key moment in helping them to politicize their own situation, rather than remaining trapped in the neoliberal ideology that only recognizes individual responsibility for unemployment. Later the movement worked with a group of social psychology students based at the University of La Matanza to investigate more of these subjective effects of unemployment and the ways in which that neoliberal ideology becomes internalized. This investigation led the MTD to recognize guilt as a key element of neoliberal ideology, which must be overcome in order to effectively organize the unemployed (Flores, 2005). Following this research on the role of guilt, the MTD continued doing workshops with social psychology students on how to counteract this guilt and build new relationships based on solidarity. These workshops and experiences of collective in-

vestigation around guilt were part of an essential process of building the relationships that would allow the movement to grow and workers to cooperatively self-manage the textile workshop and bakery.

Soon after occupying the abandoned school building where the cooperatives are also located, the MTD La Matanza officially inaugurated the building as the Center for Education and Formation of Communitarian Culture (*Centro de Educación y Formación de Cultura Comunitaria*, CE-FOCC). They sought to use the space to provide educational activities to children and adults in the neighborhood, as well as for more formal political “formation” exercises as part of the political project of constructing the movement. Here education was not considered a neutral, objective good, an object to be handed down from those who know to those who do not, but rather as a political tool for the creation of new values and subjectivities. Therefore, they emphasize the construction of “communitarian culture” in all of their educational practices, using an assembly-based model that values different voices and experiences, understanding that new knowledges and relations are formed precisely through the interaction of differences in the process of discussion and learning.

Early childhood education quickly became one of the MTD La Matanza’s main priorities after they realized that cooperative values need to be instilled from a young age. In 2004, they opened the preschool CIEL (*Crecer Imaginando en Libertad – Grow up Imagining Freedom*) in their premises. The preschool is made up of two classrooms, divided by age, and employs two trained preschool teachers. It also relies on a large number of outside volunteers, often education students from the nearby University of La Matanza or international volunteers, and is supported financially by the MTD’s other productive enterprises and donations from local and international NGOs. The preschool’s stated goal is to start fomenting values of mutual aid, care, and solidarity from an early age. Classes start each day with a check-in, giving children a chance to speak about issues in their lives, and throughout the day cooperative games and activities are emphasized, providing an alternative to the often violent and competitive norms common in the neighborhood. Thus, students learn different ways of relating to one another and to adults, as well as the skills necessary to continue fighting for their rights as they grow older.

The MTD La Matanza also started an adult literacy program, which evolved into a popular high school, that later split into a separate organization due to political differences. The school expanded to offer a complete primary school education for adults and, in 2010, a high school for adults. Many of the students are migrants from rural areas of Argentina and neighboring countries, mostly women, who had few opportunities for formal education in their youth. Besides teaching the government-mandated courses, the school teaches classes about health and nutrition, as well as political formation, reading influential Latin American Marxists and learning about the revolutionary history of Argentina. These readings and discussions serve to politicize neighborhood residents, encouraging them to take action to improve their own quality of life. The principle teachers are paid by the government for their work, while other “volunteers” count the time they spend in the school as their weekly work requirement to receive unemployment benefits.

The MTD also makes an effort to provide childcare or create child-friendly spaces at all of its events. On the one hand, providing childcare allows women, who are normally the primary caregivers for children, to participate in other activities, be they political or some sort of employment. It makes taking care of the children a collective, community responsibility, not the sole responsibility of mothers or other female relatives, and enables women to be more equal participants in the movement as a whole. On the other hand, by paying members to work in childcare and educational projects, either directly or through government subsidies, the MTD demonstrates the importance it places on these activities. Valuing and compensating this labor thus directly contrasts against its invisibilization and naturalization as women’s labor under capitalism, and allows for the work to be shared rather than falling solely to women.

MTD Solano: Housing and Health

The MTD de Solano formed in the mid 1990s in the southern region of Greater Buenos Aires as a group of unemployed women and men occupied a church and began to discuss their common problems. Like the MTD La Matanza, they first focused their energy on organizing road-blocks, as well as directly protesting at supermarkets demanding food.

After the 2002 murders of Dario Santillán and Maximiliano Kosteki,⁶ the MTD Solano decided to reorient its energies towards the neighborhood where most of its members lived. There they started working to address the most immediate needs of neighborhood residents – access to food, housing, and healthcare – as well as the generalized feeling of a lack of trust and solidarity in their communities (Colectivo Situaciones and MTD Solano, 2002).

One of the MTD Solano's primary areas of intervention has been on issues related to housing and land access. They understand housing as more than a physical roof over one's head, but also as the stability and self-determination of a home and the basis for the construction of new social relations and community. In 2005, members of the MTD Solano participated in the takeover and settlement of a neighborhood in the municipality of Florencio Varela. According to one participant, "we were thirty to forty families that wanted to have the experience of living and constructing in community. The houses were built collectively among all of us, we even made the [concrete] blocks that we used to build these houses" (Interview, September 8, 2012). She describes the situation leading up to the initial takeover:

After participation in various land takeovers in the southern region of Greater Buenos Aires (in Quilmes, Solano, Varela) since the 1990s with very intense movements of organization and community struggle, we started to think about what would happen if we won the land. In general, very different logics were imposed than those that some of us wanted for ourselves. Many times they went through moments of community, organization, assembly and collective logics to other moments where a more individual logic reigned. After the events of "Puente Pueyrredón" the need to construct a communitarian space emerged, the desire to project a life with our friends. (Ibid.)

This settlement was the MTD Solano's main basis of operation for many years, from which they organized other neighborhood residents

⁶ On June 26, 2002, two piqueteros from the Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón, of which the MTD Solano then formed a part, were shot and killed by police in a piquete on Puente Pueyrredón.

around issues relating to everyday life in the neighborhood, including creating a large community garden and a number of cultural and educational activities.

Nearly seven years later, the MTD was forced out of that neighborhood due to increased violence from local drug dealers seeking to expand into their territory. They decided to build a new housing collective in another part of the urban periphery. Members build the houses themselves, following the principle of the *minga*, or collective work sessions, originating in campesino and indigenous communities. These *mingas* are an informal sort of contract or work agreement between participants: everyone helps one family build their house this month, and a few months later everyone pitches in to help another family. In this way, the *mingas* constitute a rotating form of collaborative work and mutual aid, creating long-lasting relationships and bonds of solidarity and community between participants.

The houses are built according to environmental principles that make them more energy-efficient, such as the green or living roofs covered in vegetation in order to better insulate the building. Much of this construction expertise comes from visits and workshops with environmental activists and indigenous communities. Additionally, as an organization of unemployed/precarious/informal workers, the MTD members have varied experiences in the construction industry, as well as odd jobs involving carpentry or electrical wiring. This mixture of different skills and experiences, one of the outcomes of the heterogeneity of the composition of “the unemployed”, here proves a crucial asset in building a new community. Collective work also produces the feeling that these are all common projects in which everyone is invested, and materially produces new social relations and ties of solidarity between participants. The *minga* points to a different way of organizing labor in general, in a non-alienated and dignified way. In other words, it is not only the houses themselves, nor even the physical community of the collective houses, that are the outcome of political struggle, but also how the houses are built, the social relations and subjectivities created in the process, and those that persist in the newly created space.

The MTD Solano also operates a health clinic located in another neighborhood of the urban periphery. On the one hand, this clinic

provides important services for neighborhood residents who otherwise would not have access to them. The clinic relies on doctors and other healthcare practitioners who are willing to donate their time to serving low-income communities, as well as donations and government subsidies for some medical supplies. Many movement members have training in psychology or other health services and dedicate much of their time to working in the clinic. (This is in part due to the rich network of alternative education institutions, such as the *Universidad Popular de Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, which allows for activists to study these topics for free and with a social justice focus.) Besides providing these much-needed services, the clinic also seeks to create alternative notions of health and care. Recognizing how capitalist values have deeply affected the medical industry in terms of prioritizing the profits of the pharmaceutical industry over the well-being of people, the clinic aims to promote a notion of health based on collective well-being rather than the distribution of drugs and diagnoses of illnesses. Many of the clinic's services focus on mental health, especially problems related to substance abuse and addiction. However, rather than reinforcing the mainstream medical approach that treats these as psychiatric illnesses, clinic workers adopt an approach that treats these problems in a more holistic manner: for individuals to receive treatment, their family members (defined broadly meaning at least one family member or close friend) must also participate in separate sessions, in an attempt to address underlying causes of the issue and create a more healthy and supportive community for the afflicted person. Health care practitioners work in pairs, usually a medical doctor paired with a social psychologist, to treat patients. They also participate in various alternative health networks, such as a local women's health group and other groups working around indigenous ideas of health and well-being (Interview with Neka Jara and Alberto Spagnolo, February 18, 2013).

Thus, through organizing around housing and health care, as well as food production in their community garden, the MTD Solano directly intervenes in issues of reproduction. These interventions allow its members to sustain themselves, while also creating different social relations that challenge the reproduction of capitalist relations. Members of the MTD consistently speak of *care* as one of their fundamental values and the cornerstone of their project: care for each other as members

of a movement, as well as care for the environment and community in a broader sense. This emphasis on care permeates all of their activities: from literally taking care of each in the clinic and collectively caring for children to taking care to equally share labor and decision-making responsibilities within the organization. Speaking of care implies a way of engaging differently in reproduction by prioritizing the creation and reproduction of life and healthy social relations over the reproduction of capital. This emphasis on the ethics of care is an important thread running through the feminization of politics at different scales and in different places, pointing to a way of carrying out social reproduction otherwise (Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2015; Motta, 2013; Zechner and Rubner Hansen, 2016).

Conclusion

This analysis of the unemployed workers' movements from the perspective of reproductive labor has shown that the unemployed workers' movements emerged as a response to a crisis of social reproduction, that they successfully made that reproductive labor visible, politicized it, and in some cases were able to provide remuneration for it, and that their projects were aimed at creating autonomous forms of social reproduction in specific territories. These movements point to a new spatiality of political struggle: rather than being centered around the spaces and institutions of the state, the unemployed workers' movements organized *territorially*, in the spaces of everyday life in which social reproduction occurs. Organizing around the spaces where people live and issues of social reproduction has allowed the MTDs to focus on what people have in common, despite the heterogeneous composition and social fragmentation of the unemployed.

This focus on reproduction and the spaces of everyday life can be understood in a broader framework of the feminization of resistance, referring not only to the increased visible participation of women in movements, but also to profound changes to how resistance is carried out. This new form of politics emphasizes internal dynamics and democratic decision-making processes, as well as a focus on the everyday practicalities of how members reproduce themselves, rather than privileging an abstract and state-centered politics. This means challenging machismo

and patriarchal forms of dominance within movements, as well as gendered divisions of labor that often consider issues of reproduction to be secondary or naturally women's work. By organizing explicitly around issues of reproduction, the MTDs demonstrate the importance of this work and those who carry it out.

Focusing on reproduction also allows for rethinking not only what counts as labor but what labor is valuable and necessary work. Reproduction opens an interesting question because it is the reproduction of capital but also of ourselves. If it is in these activities of reproduction that we reproduce the capitalist relation, then it is also where we can start to build something new. As Federici states, addressing the political potential of organizing around reproduction:

For nothing so effectively stifles our lives as the transformation into work of the activities and relations that satisfy our desires. By the same token, it is through the day-to-day activities by means of which we produce our existence, that we can develop our capacity to cooperate and not only resist our dehumanization but learn to reconstruct the world as a space of nurturing, creativity, and care. (2012: 12)

Reproduction is thus the central point of conflict: where capitalist relations can be reproduced or not, either as the basis of exploitation or the seeds of new social relations and ways of living together.

Recent events continue to indicate that social reproduction is at the crux of contemporary struggles: struggles over life and death for the poor and unemployed, but also attempts by capital and the state to expand their control over ever more areas of life by attempting to capture and capitalize on reproductive labor. However, women continue to lead the resistance to processes of neoliberalism and the precaritization wrought by this crisis of reproduction, through the creation of autonomous forms of social reproduction and the promotion of an ethics of care that challenges the basic assumptions of capitalist development.

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Decolonizing Australia's Body Politics: Contesting the Coloniality of Violence of Child Removal

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Abstract

In this article I develop a critique of the continual historic and contemporary use of child removal to systematically pathologize and criminalize Black, Indigenous, and poor-white motherhood. I demonstrate how the technologies and rationalities put to work as part of the reproduction of the modern state, wound the body politic in ways that disarticulate the conditions of possibility of the political subjectivity of the subaltern. I develop my critique as a re-reading of contemporary child removal in Australia through a decolonizing feminist perspective. Accordingly, I begin by demonstrating how the biopolitical attempt to produce the raced and gendered subject as a non-subject denied rights and rationality is co-constitutive of the foundations and continuing reproduction of settler-colonial societies, including that of the Australian state and polity, in the neoliberal period. However, I do not stop at this point, for this is to re-inscribe the subaltern in the logics of denial of subjectivity of coloniality. Thus in the second part of the article, emerging from activist scholarship with the Family Inclusion Strategy Hunter, Hunter Valley, NSW Australia – an organization comprised of families who have or are experiencing child removal, practitioners working in the out-of-home care and child protection sectors, and critical scholars that are united in their commitment to foreground the voices, knowledges, and perspectives of birth families in the practices, policies, and politics of child removal – I offer a critique through praxis of these dehumanizing state practices. I focus on three areas: Decolonizing Monologues of Intervention through Dialogues of Connection; Co-construction of Knowledges for Transformation; and Encounters across Borders: Embodying and Embedding Critical Reflexivity. My engagement foregrounds how these active processes of subjectivity of racialized subaltern mothers and families, and their allies offer emergent possibilities for a decolonizing politics which seeks not recognition within the “state” of things as they are but a radical disruption of the terms of the con-

versation as they have and continue to structure Australia's state and polity. This praxical analysis and reflection contributes and extends our conceptualization of the feminization of resistance by bringing to the centre of our analytic and political attention the decolonizing epistemological and methodological aspects of this reinvention of emancipatory politics.

Legacies and Logics of Coloniality

Settler-Colonial societies are characterized by a history in which their Indigenous First Peoples were treated as non-subjects through rationalities and logics of elimination either through direct physical annihilation or processes of cultural, psychological, and subjective assimilation (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). It is the latter logic and rationality and how this is reproduced in the contemporary neoliberal period that is the subject of critique here. Of particular ethical and political importance is maintaining in productive tension and analytic visibility both how such strategies work to reproduce the non-subjectivity of the racialized subaltern women and undercut the possibility of emergence of her political subjectivity, *and*, how they are resisted through processes of active subjectivity and onto-epistemological practices of (re)humanization.

Strategies of child removal to “remove the Indian from the man” characterize the interventions of assimilationist politics in Australia, Canada, United States, and New Zealand. Historical archives and critical analysis demonstrate how such strategies were premised upon the denial of the humanness and subjectivity of Indigenous peoples, and in the case of the US its Afro-American population, and a lack of recognition that there was anything to be learned from Indigenous and Black culture and ways of life. As an Inquiry into assimilationist policies in Australia between the 1920s and 1970s concluded “the predominant aim of Indigenous child removals was the absorption or assimilation of the children in to the wider, non-Indigenous community so that their unique cultural values and ethnic identities would disappear” (Krieken, 2004: 141). Ab-originality was constructed as a primitive uncivilized social order lacking historical agency and knowledge as against the white settler society which was represented as synonymous with civilization, progress, and reason (Morgensen, 2011).

When we bring the gendered subject into our considerations, then the interrelationships of paternalism and patriarchy become evident in the formation of settler-colonial states and polity. Aboriginal, and Black mothers in the States, were represented as “children of the state” lacking rationality, reason, and knowledge and also as Salmon (2011: 169) describes in the Canadian case but representative of more generic discursive positioning “as abusive, neglectful and otherwise dangerous to their children”. Racialized subaltern mothers were therefore interpolated as non-citizens through infantilization and pathologization which left them subject to the interventions of the state onto their bodies, and into their families and communities (Jacobs, 2009). In the Australian context this resulted in the genocidal policies now referred to as the Stolen Generation (Krieken, 2004; Robinson and Paten, 2008). At once therefore was a paradoxical process of both denial and invisibilization as knowing subjects with history, culture, and agency, at the same time as a process of being made hyper-visible through representations that sought to caste these women and their families as legitimately subject to “civilizing” state interventions. As Sara Ahmed so eloquently describes in the Phenomenology of Whiteness,

When we talk about a “sea of whiteness” or “white space” we are talking about *the* repetition of the passing by of some bodies and not others, for sure. But non-white bodies do inhabit white spaces; we know this. *Such bodies are made invisible when we see spaces as being white, at the same time as they become hyper-visible when they do not pass, which means they “stand out” and “stand apart”.* (2007: 156, author emphasis)

Whilst it is essential to re-tell this story of the violences of the settler-colonial past it is important that we do not stop here as this can fall prey to a re-presentation of Indigenous and Black communities and mothers as passive spectators on their lives and merely victimized recipients of state policies. This can reinforce a narrative which as Maria Lugones (2010: 748) describes “[assumes that] the global capitalist colonial system is in every way successful in its destruction of people’s, knowledges, relations and economies”.

As archival evidence suggests strategies of child removal were developed as a way of quelling potential threats to order (both social and

political), as a biopolitical process of disciplining and controlling the autonomous female subject and collective forms of social reproduction, and as a means of breaking Aboriginal and Afro-American resistance (Roberts, 2007, 2012; Salmon, 2011; Robinson and Paten, 2008). This foregrounds how oppressed and colonized communities resisted such practices of assimilation, denial, and annihilation. Affirming Lugones' reminder that the racialized subaltern woman

[is] a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, who perceives doubly, where the sides of the locus are in tension, and the conflict itself actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation (2010: 748).

Neoliberal Smoke and Mirrors

Such processes of dehumanization and de-subjectification of Black and Indigenous subaltern mothers have continued into the neoliberal era despite both the formal recognition of citizenship status of Indigenous peoples and “official” apologies for systematic strategies of child removal in Settler Colonial States such as Australia and Canada.

Neoliberal social interventions are justified through a discourse that individualizes social ills. Thus social ills such as poverty, domestic violence, addiction, unemployment, and mental health become the responsibility of poor individuals' defects, pathologies, and deficits (Motta, 2008; Mansell and Motta, 2013). This discourse responsabilizes poor communities for the destructive impacts of neoliberal reform and makes them accountable to the state for their actions and behaviors at the same time as state run social services and support systems are privatized, outsourced, and downsized in the name of growth and efficiency. Institutionally this is manifested in the increasing turn to audit and risk cultures and practices, which create “rituals of verification” (Power, 1997 cited in Scherz, 2011: 35) that transform a political question into a technical issue by “recasting it in the neutral language of science” (Dreyfus and Rainbow, 1983: 196, cited in Scherz 2011: 35).

The intersecting paradox that faces poor mothers, often amongst the most adversely hit by these reforms and (mis)representations is to be

caught between the state strategies of privacy and punishment represented as expert and objective strategies of attentiveness and care. Yet the privatization and individualization of social reproduction hurts mothers. Firstly, it results in women from the poorest communities with the fewest resources coming to shoulder the greatest burdens of ensuring the well-being of their children. Secondly, as they are re-presented as responsible for their and their children's social and economic conditions they are easily pathologized as unfit mothers subject to state intervention, surveillance, and punishment (Roberts, 2009; Salmon, 2011). In this context welfare systems reproduce strategies of subjectification which seek to regulate the behaviors of poor mothers so as to reproduce their political and social disarticulation (Roberts, 2007; Mansell and Motta, 2013).

The disciplinary neoliberal state's intersecting strategies of privatizing of social reproduction and pathologizing of poor mothers imbricates smoothly with the historic racist discourses which represent Black and Indigenous mothers as unfit for rule and citizenship and thus legitimately subject to state paternalistic and patriarchal interventions. They build on and reinforce misrepresentations that pathologize Black and Indigenous motherhood which portray black women as "sexually licentious... the family-demolishing Matriarch, the devious welfare queen, the depraved crack addict accompanied by her equally monstrous crack baby- paint [ing] a picture of a dangerous motherhood that must be regulated and punished" (Roberts, 2012: 1292).

Research into contemporary forms of biopolitical punishment and regulation of racialized and feminized subjects in settler colonial states demonstrates that numerous iterations of social policy related to child protection and community cohesion and framed as practices of care and commitment reproduce discourses of dehumanization and epistemological negation. These discourses represent, in the Canadian case, Aboriginal mothers and their children as objects for state intervention that are "unable and unwilling to care for their children" (Salmon, 2011: 170), and in the US, they represent Black mothers "as incapable of governing themselves and need(ing) state supervision" which helps to justify intense state surveillance and intervention into black communities and families (Roberts, 2007: 3-4). In this way Aboriginal and Black mothers become positioned as outside of the circuits of productive citizenship

and as against the needs and interests of the public. Arguably, this justifies the state's intervention into their lives in ways which re-traumatize and seek to ensure order and acquiescence that “help[s] contain resistance against the state's support of systematic inequalities and collusion with corporate interests” (Roberts, 2009: 194).

The net of disciplinary biopolitical regulation and fragmentation of the body politic is widening as the possibilities of “inclusion” into neoliberal regimes of accumulation decreases (Chant, 2007; Morgensen, 2009). Thus the poor white mother becomes increasingly represented as a racialized non-subject, legitimately subject to similar practices of blaming, shaming and disciplinary interventions. As Sara Ahmed (2007: 159–160) explains:

Some bodies, even those that pass as white, might still be “out of line” with the institutions they inhabit. After all, institutions are meeting points, but they are also where different lines intersect, where lines cross with other lines, to create and divide spaces... Becoming white as an institutional line is closely related to the vertical promise of class mobility: you can move up only by approximating the habitus of the white bourgeois body.

As these examples foreground the consequences of disproportionate practices of child removal from subaltern Black and Indigenous communities in settler-colonial societies work to inflict further individual and collective soul wounds (for a detailed discussion of this concept see the work of Duran et al., 2008) on communities who have already suffered centuries of wounding *and* enact fresh wounds on communities suffering the traumatic impacts of changes in patterns of accumulation which result in mass and chronic unemployment and social exclusion. This is a politics of state shaming, blaming, and abuse which “does not honor... women [as it] decrees simultaneously that these women must be and yet cannot be normative mothers” (Fraser, 1989: 153 in Salmon, 2011: 173; for a detailed analysis of how feminist discourses have been co-opted into these biopolitical logics see Bumiller, 2008). A poor racialized and feminized underclass becomes re-presented as less-than-citizen and their needs “[positioned] as against those of the public” (Salmon, 2011: 173). This justifies policies and practices of intervention that build upon and

extend historic strategies of dehumanization that aim to produce the raced and gendered subject as a non-subject and disarticulate the conditions of possibility for their political subjectivity. This demonstrates the historic and contemporary co-constitutive role of such practices of dehumanization to settler-colonial states and “democratic” polities.

Representational Absence of the Racialized Subaltern Mother

Critical political economy analysis of contemporary processes of neoliberal dispossession have paid scant attention to how these state disciplinary technologies and strategies impact on the gendered and racialized body of the proletariat (sf. Hardt and Negri, 2005; Harvey, 2007; Žižek, 1998). This reproduces the invisibilization of Black and Indigenous motherhood as a site of oppression *and* resistance despite these women often being at the forefront of the attacks of neoliberalism of social, economic, and political rights and making up a large proportion of many of the movements resisting such politics in the Global South (Motta, 2013, 2014; Gutierrez, 2012). If the Black woman and mother is re-presented, she is as Lugones (2006: 78) describes “not within the bounds of normalcy (that is without structural description)... as inferior”. Such a representational absence reinforces a patriarchal logic of coloniality in the production of “critical” theory which re-enacts the very processes of denial and elision it seemingly seeks to contest (Motta, 2016).

On the other hand, feminist materialist analysis has contributed to visibilizing the gendered impacts of contemporary neoliberalism on the body of the global proletariat. Thinkers such as Sylvia Chant (2008) have demonstrated how processes of dispossession have eroded the survival mechanisms of poor communities and augmented the burden that women carry for ensuring the welfare and social reproduction of their children and families. This increased burden of social reproduction is combined with the entrance of poor women into the workforce often in unregulated and casualized conditions. Such a combination of structural shifts has resulted in the feminization of poverty with increasingly precarious and violent conditions of everyday life contextualizing the

experiences of millions of women and their families across the Globe. Nuanced analyses (sf. Olivera, 2006) have demonstrated the intimate link between these processes of structural reform and the increase in intimate partner violence and femicide as communities are ripped apart, social identities devalued, and cultural practices and autonomous moral economies eroded. However, there is again little work in relation to gendered state strategies of dehumanization, denial, and disarticulation in relation to welfare, child protection, and prison systems. Additionally, whilst these analyses visibilize conditions of gendered, classed, and racialized oppression, they reproduce the racialized subaltern women as victim, re-presenting her silence and reinforcing a discursive representation which elides her subjectivity (sf. for a similar critique Mohanty, 1988, 2003).

More specific critical analysis of state welfare and prison systems have demonstrated how the prison industrial complex in the US is an instrument for the management of social and racialized marginality (see for example Chartand, 2016; Waquant, 2002). However, these accounts neglect the gendered intersections of power and oppression and so neglect incarcerated women. Yet as Roberts (2012: 1483) demonstrates “Incarcerations impact on black mothers is an important element of how mass incarceration acts as a means of political subordination. One of the most pernicious features of prison expansion is that it devastates community-based resources for contesting prison policy and other systemic forms of disenfranchisement”. Thus the representational absence of Black women and mothers from these analyses miss the vital gendered linkage between the prison system, the foster care system, and the attack on the social and political power of poor Black communities, and conversely devalues the central role of Black mothers in resisting such a nexus of power (Roberts, 2012; Mohanty, 1988).

Those scant critical studies across the disciplines that engage directly with child removal are historically focused (Krieken, 2004; Robinson and Paten, 2008) or develop a critical engagement with social work policy delinked from broader analysis of neoliberal political economy (Scholfield et al., 2010; Kapp and Propp, 2002; Burgheim, 2005), and/or place emphasis on the psychological, emotional, and cultural impact of such policy for community cohesion and resilience (Mason and Gib-

son, 2004; O'Neill, 2005). It is rare to find work which situates such strategies within historic and contemporary political economy critique of (neoliberal) capitalist coloniality and which interrogates and exposes the political functions of this massive removal of children from racialized subaltern mothers. A key exception is the work of Roberts (2007, 2009, and 2012) which explicitly seeks to expose and dissect the political function of such systems in the case of the United States and their role in reproducing a deeply unequal and dehumanizing social system which systematically oppresses Black communities and Black mothers. However, despite the importance of visibilizing historic and contemporary forms of oppression such work speaks over the voices of racialized mothers in that again they become re-presented as if global capitalism were completely successful in subjugating Black mothers and motherhood. This re-produces, as Lugones (2010) and I (2014) argue, despite social justice intentions, the invisibilization of the political subjectivity of racialized subaltern mothers.

On the Need for Feminist Decolonizing Methodologies

If we start from the decolonial feminist perspective of embracing the place-based experiences and knowledges of subaltern racialized women (Motta, 2014), then as Lugones (2010: 746) reminds us, it is “belonging to impure communities that gives life to her agency”. This implies beginning from the onto-epistemological politics of subaltern racialized women through embracing the conflicting, tension-ridden experiences of being at once subjugated as a racialized subaltern non-subject *and* resisting this through active processes of subjectivity. It is here that we move beyond both the representational invisibility of the racialized women *and also* the racialized subaltern woman as victim detailed above, to a perspective of feminism in decolonizing praxis (see also for a similar critique Motta, 2013). This is by necessity a praxical task which implies a stepping inwards to the contours of everyday life and the embodied experience of the lived contradictions between the “fiction” and realities of capitalist (self) representation, which as Lugones (2010: 746) describes

... is to enact a critique of the racialised, colonial and capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social. As such it places the theorist in the midst of the people in a historical, peopled, subjective/intersubjective understanding of the oppressing-resisting relation at the intersection of the complex systems of oppression.

The methodologies of the feminist in decolonial praxis become methodologies of everyday life that enable her to co-facilitate processes of critical intimacy as opposed to the groundless distance of research embodied in the logics of coloniality (Motta, 2016). An epistemological stepping inwards involves nurturing and experimenting with knowledge processes in which we collectively bring to awareness how systems of oppression wound us as communities and as individuals. However, it is of no surprise that decolonizing epistemological practices comes from those who inhabit the epistemological margins of colonial difference. They emerge out of the struggle and practice against ontological and epistemological denial as outsiders-within formal education and in the multiple informal spaces of everyday life and community organizing against processes of subjectification of coloniality. These processes of subjectification are, as Lugones (2010: 748) describes

... met in the flesh over and over by oppositional responses grounded in a long history of oppositional responses and lived as sensical in alternative, resistant socialities at the colonial difference.

It is also of no surprise that there is so little written about decolonizing work for activist-researchers, for as Gill et al. (2012: 11) argue, “[there] is limited representation of these peoples in the academy”.

Identifying as an outsider-within formal educational spaces, I have embodied and embedded such commitments and practices of co-construction in my scholarly practice through exploring with others ways to bring to (our) life(ves) prefigurative epistemologies (Motta, 2011) and methodologies of the storyteller (Motta, 2014, 2016). Prefigurative epistemologies are embedded in the collective construction of multiple readings of the world, in which we tell our stories to re-enchant the world and our communities, speak in multiple tongues, rethinking and creating

what it means to speak, to write, to theorize. Here we co-create the conditions of possibility, and the terms of our own healing visibility to disrupt both the death-producing logics of invisibility and the pathologizing gaze of hyper-visibility. As Anzaldúa (2007: 81) describes in relation to her experience – and eminently applicable here – “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing; I will have my voice... I will have my serpent’s tongue – my woman’s voice”.

Prefigurative epistemologies are inherently pedagogical in that they involve the development of practices of (un)learning that enable transformation of conditions of oppression. Critical to emancipatory pedagogies such as these is an overcoming of the dualism between mind and body, theory and practice, and knower and known. This involves, as I have argued elsewhere, moving away from the Monological silencing epistemologies of re-presentation and moving towards methodologies of the storyteller. These methodologies foster processes of critical intimacy to co-create a politics of dialogical healing and transformation in which all become co-constructors of knowledge, our social worlds, and ourselves.

In my collaboration with Family Inclusion Strategy Hunter (FISH) to date, such epistemological prefiguration has been methodologically actualized in a decolonizing Participatory Action Research (PAR) process which builds upon traditional PAR studies in its: i) conceptualization of the boundaries of the research, ii) conceptualization of theory/knowledge; iii) and the relationship posited between subject (researcher) and object (researched). In terms of the boundaries of PAR, many PAR studies tend to develop place-based ethnographies which bound the nature of community participation and knowledge production to understanding local conditions, behaviors, and practices. Additionally, in many PAR studies the researcher takes on the role of analyzing “everyday life from the standpoint of an outsider looking in” (Akon, 2011: 115). Both these limitations result from the epistemological assumptions that communities’ knowledge is experiential and concrete, and it is the researcher who is able to systematize and theorize more deeply these concrete experiences in a way that will be of use to communities in their concrete objectives of change (see Motta, 2011 for an extensive critique of this position). However, such an epistemological underpinning reproduces

the hierarchies of a colonizing politics of knowledge, in which as decolonial feminist scholars describe (Lugones, 2010; Motta, 2014), communities are considered unable to produce theoretical knowledge and the thinker is posited as an abstract, individualized, and masculinized subject able to separate from the messiness of embodied experience to produce knowledge to guide everyday life. This invisibilizes the ways in which theoretical knowledge can be produced collectively through processes of critical reflection on the lived experiences of oppression and struggle, and how theoretical knowledge and systematization can take multiple forms including, but not limited to, the textual.

Thus the methodology developed in this research differs in its epistemological assumptions, as it specifically seeks to decentre the knowing-subject of coloniality and instead embrace collective processes of knowledge construction and multiple forms of knowledge (written, oral, visual) with participants in the research project. Such an epistemological foundation also implies that the researcher moves away from representing the “other” and towards collective problem-solving, healing, and transformation. The researcher’s experience and knowledge becomes one element in the dialogue out of which a research project emerges. It also implies that the researcher takes on a facilitative role in the co-creation of knowledge for change (co-defined), becoming part of the change-process itself. This re-orientates and dislodges the traditional dualism between research (subject of research) and researched (object of research) as all become knowers and researchers.

These ethical, political, and epistemological commitments have shaped my engagement and participation in FISH. They meant that I joined as one participant amongst many, offering particular pedagogical and methodological knowledge and experiences and open to co-create the directions, practices, and objectives of FISH. Elements of this journey are outlined below as a way to foreground the onto-epistemological practices of humanization, resilience, and hope of racialized subaltern women and their allies.

Contesting the Violence of Coloniality of Child Removal in Australia

Racist state technologies and rationalities of dehumanization which attempt to (re)produce the non-subjectivity of subaltern racialized mothers intertwine with the logics of the disciplinary neoliberal state in pernicious ways in contemporary Australia.

As Walter, Taylor and Habibis (2011: 11) argue in relation to social work as a discipline and practice “Whiteness as a concept, theory and reflexive practice has a low visibility within the pedagogy and curriculum of Australian social work... [there] remains a ‘Whiteness gap’”. The epistemological underpinnings of social work thus continue to be embedded within logics of coloniality and the negation of the subjectivity and epistemology of Aboriginal peoples. Social work education and expertise remains located and embedded within a Eurocentric perspective, which legitimizes a universalizing expert perspective that negates difference and diversity, and instead reproduces the representational absence of the racialized subaltern mother as knower and carer (Young, 2011: 114–115).

Such monological logics and rationalities imbricate smoothly with the individualizing and pathologizing shifts in social work policy during the neoliberal era. The principles underpinning current social policy for child protection emphasize the centrality of the family and the primacy of professional and scientific expertise, resulting in policy and practice which focuses attention on the individual. The problem to be addressed is isolated, and professional service or treatment is provided to change and modify behavior in one or more of the protagonists within the confines of the family unit. As Young (2008: 106) reflects “it is clear that the intricacies or complexities and varied forms of family life and human behaviour that exist within a range of socio-economic and cultural circumstances are relegated in importance”.

These intertwining logics of historic processes of dehumanization and contemporary neoliberal forms of pathologization and re-traumatizing interventions are perhaps most clearly manifested in the Northern Territory Intervention of 2007. In this situation alleged cases of systematic child sexual abuse became a context in which the state intervened to “protect the children” through a representation of Aboriginal communi-

ties as pathologically abusive and neglectful. Such social pathology was used to legitimize militarized interventions and intensified surveillance onto Aboriginal communities that continue to this day. The coloniality of social work and the neoliberal disciplinary state here came together to reproduce epistemological and ontological violence through “policies of surveillance and subjugation, ...claimed by their authors as policies of deliverance and civilization” (Young, 2008: 119).

In the context of the Hunter Valley, where FISH emerged, this confluence of coloniality and contemporary disciplinary neoliberalism manifests in the Hunter Central Coast region of NSW having the highest rate of children and young people in out-of-home care in NSW in 2012/13 (NSW Family and Community Services, 2014), including continuing very high rates of new entries to care. The rate is significantly higher than most other regions. NSW has the highest proportion of children and young people in out-of-home care in Australia with the exception of the Northern Territory (AIHW, 2014). These two figures combined suggest that this region has one of the highest proportions of children and young people in out-of-home care in Australia. This is combined with the privatization, closure and/or outsourcing of mental health, domestic violence, and out-of-home care services (Cox, 2014). Juridically in the state of New South Wales there is a shift towards support and recommendation for adoption of children removed from their birth families if the situation of risk and/or harm has not be resolved within set time-frames and making adoption easier from out-of-home care without parental consent (see FACS, 2013 for an overview of these changes which mirror similar shifts in the US, Roberts, 2007, 2009). This is embedded and reflected in social work training and practice with a shift away from traditions of community welfare and social justice-orientated praxis towards neoliberal individualized and risk-focused interventions and discursive framings of child protection issues. This tends to individualize social problems facing subaltern communities and families and pit child interests against those of parents and families framing the role of the social worker/child protection agent as protecting children against unfit parents (Rogowski, 2015; Thorpe, 2007; FIN, 2007).

In this context critical practitioners from the out-of-home care NGO sectors, critical scholars, and a small group of parents who had

experienced or were experiencing the out-of-home care and child protection systems came together in early 2014 to form a steering-group called Family Inclusion Strategy Hunter. FISH emerged out of growing concern of the lack of voice and representation of marginalized families in out-of-home care processes and shared the broad intention of facilitating processes and practices of parent voice and participation. The group converged on a commitment to addressing these issues with a parent-centered approach to facilitate the voice, visibility, and agency of families so as to foster reflexive and inclusive practice and transform/reform of the discourses that shape and frame policy and practice.

My resonances with the orientation of FISH were its commitment to collaborative and dialogical knowledge processes with parents and families facing the disciplinary neoliberal state, questioning of the individualization of social ills discourse framing policy interventions and commitment to fostering critical reflexivity amongst practitioners. My engagement has focused on supporting the development of methodologies that facilitate the construction of knowledges for transformation, active engagement with developing and consolidating processes and practices of critical reflection with critical practitioners in the out-of-home care sector, and supporting the process of consolidating and nurturing the sustainability of FISH over the medium and long term. Through this process my own framing of practitioners in this sector has changed from one of mistrusting homogenization to empathy and connection across our shared commitments to maintaining radical traditions of public service amidst increasing colonization by marketized logics. This has involved the beginnings of a transformative dialogue between traditions of narrative therapy and feminist popular education.

Below I detail three stories which I believe contribute to putting in action a feminism in decolonization praxis of transformation in text and body, and which I hope support FISH's critical reflectivity and praxis, as well as offering a contribution to the broader dialogue of how to transform, resist, and transgress historic and contemporary practices of state dehumanization of racialized subaltern mothers and communities.

Decolonizing Monologues of Intervention through Dialogues of Connection

Our first public event was targeted to practitioners and organizations in the field of out-of-home care. We spent a number of months as a group coming up with a “wicked question” around which we would organize the first ever family inclusion practice forum to be held in the Hunter Valley. The question that emerged was: “How can we support parents and family to have better relationship with their children in out-of-home care?”. This question was chosen as it enabled a discussion and critical reflection of the plight of children and young people in child protection and out-of-home care systems at a range of levels, including the voices of children and young people, the voices of parents and families of children in out-of-home care, those of authorized caregivers, and of practitioners in family support and other welfare services as well as policy makers and program developers.

The group spent a number of months thinking deeply and dialogically about the methods that would most suit the objectives of building practice partnerships between families and children, and practitioners that could enact change and transformation to improve the outcomes and experiences of marginalized children and families. We wished to enable the sharing of stories from both parents and practitioners of the out-of-home care sector as a way to identify “a shared understanding of the problems and developing next steps” (Cox, 2014: 6). However, we felt strongly that the emphasis should be on parent voices being heard and the perspective of parents and family being foregrounded as key to any meaningful dialogue in the out-of-home sector. We thus began the day with a parent panel in which four parents who had interacted with the child protection and out-of-home care systems acted as experts and consultants. They attended the forum to share their stories, experiences, and knowledges of the service system and to provide advice to practitioner participants about what had worked well and what needed change. They participated in the entire forum as experts contributing to the ongoing discussion with practitioners. We then organized the rest of the day around participatory methods of knowledge construction which included world cafe (see Appendix 1) and open space technology methods (see Appendix 2).

Out of our dialogue emerged five key areas for practice and policy change, as well as a number of ways forward (to be detailed in the following experience). We agreed to write up the process of emergence of FISH, the methodology of organizing the practice forum, and the key themes and outcomes of the forum as a report aimed at families and practitioners experiencing and working in the sector. The methodology of writing up the report mirrored that of the forum, in that we aimed to be as dialogical and inclusive as possible within time and material constraints. Jessica Cocks wrote up the initial notes and reflections from the forum and then with other practitioners deepened the dialogue with the parent experts in relation to comments and ideas that had emerged from their contribution. This was then sent on numerous iterations to critical educators and other members of FISH for their comments and reflections. The report “Building Better Relationships: Family Inclusion Strategies Hunter: Outcomes of the Family Inclusion Forum” was launched in early 2015.

The ethical and epistemological praxis of FISH enact a decolonization of the Monologues of interventions that have and continue to characterize dominant state interventions on the body and into the family and community of racialized subaltern mothers, their children and families. FISH’s practice enacts a radical disruption of the implicit hierarchies of knowledge and rationality on which they are premised and de-centers the terms of the epistemologically and politically violent conversation of coloniality in Australia.

This affirmative dialogical praxis does not seek to enclose the conversation about out-of-home care and the families and children impacted by this system into a homogenous uni-dimensional solution. Rather there is an embrace of complexities, multiplicity, and openness to the voices of racialized subaltern mothers, their children and families. Implicit within this practice is the foregrounding of a radical democratizing practice of community welfare that offers horizons to re-think the state and its social policy interventions in relation to subaltern communities. Such a radical re-thinking and reclaiming mirrors the work of sister organization Family Inclusion Network, Queensland (FIN) which describes their practice as embedded in radical community and social justice traditions “that seek to tap into, support and enable and underpin informal

community relationship, with a view to developing community groups characterised by mutuality and democracy, and committed to personal support and collective action” (Thorpe and Ramsden, 2014: 66; see also Cary et al., 2007).

Importantly the embodied lived experiences of the families and mothers are reframed and re-narrativized as sources of expertise and knowledge as opposed to spaces of lack, criminality, and deviance. The body of the racialized and feminized subaltern becomes recognized and embraced as a site of wisdom and rationality. This involves disruption of dominant embodied performances of expertise and professionalism in which the knower is the deplacated academic and policy maker who empowers the practitioner to intervene into the infantilized and pathologized lives of subaltern racialized mothers and families. As FIN (Thorpe and Ramsden, 2014: 66) reflect on their practice this involves “refram[ing] conventional professional boundaries... work[ing] with families and develop[ing] relationship with equal power”. Similarly, for FISH, deplacated and disembodied hierarchical distance becomes transfigured and prefigured with placed and embodied dialogical intimacy and connection.

Such encounters between critical practitioners and families and mothers affected by the “system” disrupt the affective hierarchies of dominant professionalized interactions in that as opposed to hierarchical separation and differentiation, emotional relationships of empathy, care, and friendship are fostered (see also Thorpe and Ramsden, 2014: 67 in relation to the concept of resourceful friends). This involved the practitioner being silent as opposed to talking and taking the authorial voice, and as such supported the creation of the conditions of possibility for decolonizing dialogue (Young, 2008: 117). The stories of parents and mothers impacted by the out-of-home care and child protection sectors deeply impacted the practitioners at the Forum. For most this was the first time that they had heard the stories of their “clients”. This caused productive discomfort which led to critical reflection and the emergence of new relationships of understanding and solidarity. We had co-created a space that as Coombes, Johnson and Howitt (2014) describe “[was] a pedagogical safe place that enable[d] inter-subjective contemplation and growth in consciousness about social processes and options for [change]”.

Co-Construction of Knowledges for Transformation

Reflecting back to the experience of the first forum, FISH as a group made a leap of faith and had a level of trust (often not explicitly spoken) in a co-constructed process of change embedded in the knowledges of parents and front-line critical practitioners. In our discussions we agreed on the importance of facilitating the forum mindfully around the objectives of enabling deep reflection as a means to come up with concrete ways forward for our work individually, collectively, and organizationally. As a key commitment was to visibilize and amplify parent and family voices that had experienced the removal of their children into out-of-home care for a short or long time, we wanted those voices to be given emphasis.

Our decision to begin with a parent as expert/consultant panel reflected this. The questions for the panel were prepared in advance and parents on the panel gave their suggestions and comments on them beforehand (see Appendix for questions). In our preparations we were mindful not to close off avenues of discussion and so as opposed to pre-framing the themes to be discussed after the parent-expert panel we instead chose two open-ended questions about family-inclusive practice. We organized the reflections around a world café model (Brown, 2005) in which pieces of butcher's paper were placed on separate tables. We then asked participants to move to a table of their choice and then to move around as a group so that all groups engaged collectively with the different answers and reflections that were emerging. We hoped that as a method this would enable a deepening of reflection on each question as each group added and engaged with what previous groups had written and discussed and then returned to their original table.

Our final session was organized as an Open Space session (as described in Michael Herman Associates, 1998). This began with the facilitator asking participants to suggest a question that emerged from their reflections and that would help us to think of ways forward in facilitating family inclusion in out-of-home care. Five questions were suggested by distinct individuals who were then asked to be the facilitator of discussion around their question. Other participants were then free to move to

any discussion during the remaining time of the forum. Throughout the day participants from FISH took notes of reflections and discussions and we noted down everything that was discussed in groups on butcher's paper, which were gradually put up around the room so that all participants could continue their individual and group reflections over lunch and during breaks. The report emerging out of the forum was organized around these notes and the themes and key questions and answers that emerged.

The key outcomes of the forum involved a focus on five themes: individual practice change, partnerships between careers, family and the service system, re-thinking models of out-of-home care and earlier intervention, and opportunities for innovation and systematic change. Under each were detailed areas where things were working, areas where there were problems and barriers and suggestions for both concrete and systematic change. In the latter this also involved commitment to further research, reflection, and collective action (Cox, 2014: 18–28).

The outcomes are too broad and complex to be detailed here, but some of the most significant are visibilizing the detrimental impact of individualizing questions of deprivation and violence, and how this resulted in practices of shaming, blaming, and humiliation of parents; challenging the dominant framing of out-of-home care and child protection which often pits the needs of children against those of family; innovating in experimenting with different forms of kinship care and the idea of fostering and supporting families; the important role of reflexivity in practice; and the importance of collective learning and collaboration between carers, families, and practitioners. Our findings speak to the continued existence of the pathologization of racialized subaltern mothers as an institutional method of subjugation in which these mothers are hyper-visible as objects of intervention but also invisibilized and denied as knowing subjects and legitimate caregivers.

The methodology of the FORUM (both as process, event, and outcome) is but one example of the many layers and forms of collective knowledge production that FISH are pioneering and prefiguring. Common to our practice is that it foregrounds a politics of knowledge that honors the embodied lived experiences of families and children as the starting point for engagement in the complex problems of deprivation,

marginalization, and violences often experienced by subaltern communities. It thus moves away from either a pathologizing and/or merely victimizing framing of racialized subaltern families and communities. Beginning from these experiences is an acknowledgement and commitment to fostering and strengthening active processes of subjectivity. Key to this is a practice of dialogue and commitment to listening, in complete divergence from the dominant historic and contemporary state practices in the sector.

However, there is also another subject who is often invisibilized and devalued in the relationship between state and racialized subaltern family and women. This is the practitioner and worker in the out-of-home care sector. It is easy to (re)produce simplistic binaries which conflate the practitioner with the state's logics and thus re-present her as an agent of dehumanization. It is also easy to fall into the dominant discourse which posits practitioners and workers as mere agents of implementation that lack critical reflexivity and expertise. However, striking from practitioners' reflections were the resonances with the stories and experiences of critical educators trying to keep spaces of hope and possibility alive in an increasingly neoliberalized education sector (see for example Motta and Cole, 2014). These included time and resource scarcity, innovating on the margins (often on top of their normal work load) and thus taking on invisibilized and devalued labor, feelings of isolation, erosion of spaces for critical reflection on practice, discourses of delegitimization, and yet incredible commitment to humanizing praxis with marginalized communities, families and children (for a discussion of some of these tensions in the Australian context see Scherz, 2011).

This mirrors and reinforces the reflections of FIN's praxis. Ros Thorpe and Kim Ramsden (2014) in detailing these experiences demonstrate how they involve reclaiming community and social justice orientations of community work and social work. This, she argues, involves disrupting normalized framings of professionalism embedded in hierarchical separation between professional and client, and judging practices of professionalism towards communities, families and parents. Instead they argue for the forming of ally friendships premised on recognition, connection, and respect. She conceptualizes this kind of praxis as fostering and developing a friendship model based on the resourceful friend con-

cept. The qualities of such an ally are “respect and empathy... ‘love of humanity’...reliable and dependable, being open to contact at times of need, including evenings and weekends, reaching out and making contact when parents are immobilised by depression, and doing the extra mile. These qualities and practices of being and relating, as she continues, “reduce the interpersonal distance between supporters and families... [such] co-producing practice with service users is a profoundly professional act and aids in healing from trauma” (Thorpe and Ramsden, 2014: 66–67).

FISH’s work arguably mirrors such praxis. The questions this raises in relation to the use and abuse of social work for decolonizing community work are immense, and again are reminiscent of those asked about the critical educator in the university and strategies which are at once in, against, and beyond the subjectivity and institution of education as hege- monically practiced. How might a strategy and praxis of in, against, and beyond social work and the figure of the social worker be put to work usefully, ethically, and meaningfully with practitioners and families? How might a decolonizing of social work be actualized? These are not questions I can answer here as these are praxical questions that emerge and can only be engaged with in the collaborative and reflexive co-creation of organizations such as FISH and FIN. However, it is essential in our exploration of these questions to engage with those marginalized voices within social work studies who bring a critique of whiteness and coloniality to bear on historic and contemporary social work epistemology and practice (see for example Young, 2008; Walter, Taylor and Habibis, 2011). Undoubtedly too, these are questions that will come to have in- creasing importance as the logics and consequences of the intertwining of coloniality and disciplinary neoliberalism become sites of political contestation.

Encounters across Borders: Embodying and Embedding Critical Reflexivity

The stories that I tell in relation to encounters across borders are more intimate in nature in that they do not involve reflection on the more visible public pedagogy of FISH and how this embodies and prefigures the politics of knowledge of our praxis. Rather I refer to encounters that oc-

cur as part of the day-to-day building of relationships and practices out of which we might nurture FISH as a collective and group of individuals articulating distinct humanizing voices in the out-of-home care sector and as/with racialized subaltern families and mothers.

After the Forum FISH moved forward to create a number of sub-groups which mapped onto the key themes and ways forward emerging out of the process and identified in the report. I joined the storytelling group whose aim was to collect stories of practitioners and families as a process of prefigurative change and also as a resource that could be used to facilitate further change and transformation. Our initial discussion revolved around the creation of a project of critical reflection with practitioners in which we would hold monthly meetings to facilitate reflection in relation to the five themes emerging from the Forum process. Whilst this project did not materialize due in most part to the time and resource scarcity and restraints identified in the Forum, the process of thinking through this project, reflecting on its non-materialization, and thinking of further ways forward opened another kind of dialogue between FISH participants. More specifically, we shared our experiences and understanding of storytelling as a means of developing a shared language through which to communicate our understanding and intentions with storytelling as a methodology. This opened a dialogue between traditions of critical narrative therapy which was influential with practitioners and feminist, decolonial popular education traditions which have shaped my practice. Clarity emerged as to the crossovers in our understanding and commitments, as well as deeper reflection about the collective nature of these methodologies and their explicit commitment to disrupt individualized and normalizing/pathologizing accounts and discourses of violence, marginalization, and addiction by situating them within the broader socio-economic, discursive and political conditions and causes as well as disrupting hegemonic conservative framings of family which tend to devalue and problematize “other” families.

This then opened the possibility for me to support the critical reflection on practice of a narrative practitioner from the group who was facilitating a collective narrative project with families who had experienced out-of-home care. This was a learning process in which questions of the art of facilitation, openness, and closure as well as (self)care of

the facilitator emerged. The hope was that this supported both our individual praxis but also deepened a shared critical narrative in relation to our work in FISH and more generally in community practice.

This engagement led to a humanization of our relationship as we came to know each other and our commitments more deeply. The forging of such linkages of solidarity fostered trust, active listening, and deepened the sense of a “we” which did not eradicate our differences and distinctive orientations of praxis but created a basis from which we might develop these. As part of this, I acted as a witness in an interview process (see White, 2007) with a mother from the project using a critical narrative therapy approach. In this instance, a number of us who volunteered from FISH were to act as witnesses to her journey with out-of-home care and processes of restoration.

As witnesses we were asked to reflect on that which resonated from her story and why we thought this resonated, which elements of our life and work it connected to, and how this experience of hearing and reflecting on her story had changed us in some way. The methodology seeks to disrupt the internalization of individualized and pathologizing discourses of deficiency and turn towards recognition of agency, understanding, wisdom, and resilience. It also opens the possibility of re-framing the individual and community's experience within broader social and political conditions and processes. Such methods are based in a methodology of deep dialogue which disrupts the self and other binary upon which the entire matrix of state intervention upon the racialized and feminized subaltern body politic is premised. As Young (2008: 117) describes “A genuine [decolonizing] human relationship, contrarily, is based on mutuality and a deep attention to the other”. Such intimate connection also invites reflection on the ways in which the story of the “other” actually has implications and resonances for “our” stories of self.

Creating a safe space for such critical intimacy as shared learning for transformation embodies commitments I have made in previous work about the methodologies of the storyteller in which “[she] enters in her integrity and wholeness in this process of epistemological reinvention. She does not enter as an external liberated knower to educate and speak for the unfree masses. She does not reproduce a victim re-presentation of the oppressed in her practice but rather begins from a commitment

to weaving together subjects, practices and stories of agency, dignity and survival” (Motta, 2014). Methodologies embodied and embedded in critical intimacy work with vulnerability as strength and are mindful of the creation of shared and safe spaces of encounter. As hooks (2003: 216) explains, “We cannot really risk emotionally in relationships where we do not feel safe”. As opposed to processes of shaming, naming, and blaming comes practices, relationships, and ethics embedded in care.

This experience helps to centre the enactment and embodiment of witnessing as part of prefigurative epistemologies of transformation. Yet it troubles any simplistic binary framing of such practices, for in this encounter we become both witness to an “other” but also to “our” selves. And of course this relates to an earlier observation about how often those called to embrace decolonizing (feminist) methodologies are those of us, as Anzaldúa describes, who “knew we were different, set apart, exiled from what is considered ‘normal’. And as we internalised this exile, we came to see the alien within us and too often, as a result, we split apart from ourselves and each other. Forever after we have been in search of that self, that ‘other’ and each other” (cited in Keating, 2009: ix). In my encounter with Christina¹ and her story I was able to give testimony to some of my story, to dislodge “perceived” unbridgeable borders of difference and separation, and to create unexpected empowering recognitions and connections.

Tensions as Sites of Possibility

There are, of course numerous tensions in the praxis detailed above. Firstly, the institutionalized nature of FISH; in that it publically represents itself as a steering-group organization, not a political or community movement. Such self-representation was perhaps inevitable in the broader context of severe socio-political fragmentation and subaltern political disarticulation (as detailed previously). The ability to shape-shift from more openly political practices and interventions to expert contributions to a social and policy debate has enabled FISH to attract a broad range of participants. However, it has also acted as a limit on how far

¹ This mother’s name has been changed for reasons of privacy and confidentiality.

the explicitly political practice of the organization can go (not only as self-representation but as material-epistemological practice). Secondly, there is a tension-ridden relationship between an ethics/politics of care and carelessness. Whilst there is a clear focus on an ethics of care and care-full attention towards birth parents and families and their children, there is, as is often the case, less attentiveness to the logics and rationalities of carelessness which structure the everyday contexts of critical practitioners in the third-sector and popular educators and researchers in the HE sector. Institutional logics which push for 24/7 availability, infinite flexibility, and ever-increasing measurable output undercut the conditions of possibility for the tender and slow work of constructing an other politics and practice of child protection and out-of-home care. They create a context in which practitioners and researchers can easily become internally split, enacting care for others, yet reproducing carelessness for themselves.

Such a tension can perhaps be understood if we think to the very foundations of social work and policy, and higher education, which posited the racialized and feminized other as an object of intervention, to be at worst annihilated and at best saved. These logics and rationalities often implicitly shape the narratives and framings of the critical praxis within FISH, so that questions of healing, voice, and participation remain focused on subaltern mothers and their families. This is of course absolutely fundamental. Yet it avoids the explicit project of decolonizing of the subjectivity of the social worker and the researcher, which would involve reflection and recognition of the ways in which patriarchal capitalist-coloniality marks, dehumanizes, and wounds their subjectivity.

Emergent Possibilities for Decolonizing Australia's Body Politics

Emerging from and with engagement with racialized subaltern mothers and families, and allies, FISH is embodying and embedding possibilities for an emergent decolonial politics which seeks not recognition within, but disruption of, the coloniality of the political as it has and continues to structure Australia's state and "democratic" polity.

FISH's politics of knowledge contributes to a politics that disrupts and dislodges the hierarchical and disembodied politics of knowledge

that has structured Australian state interventions onto the body and into the families and communities of racialized subaltern women, specifically Indigenous, poor-white, and refugee mothers and their families. It replaces these with co-constructed knowledge practices which value the wisdom and knowledges of racialized subaltern mothers and prefigure relationships of care, reciprocity, and dialogue that are deeply humanizing and democratizing.

Processes of critical reflection by racialized subaltern mothers about experiences of biopolitical dehumanization begin the unlearning of the oppressor's logics through healing of the traumas inflicted by the Australian state. This fosters active processes of subjectivity which enable the emergence of new forms of individual and collective subjectivity. Critical practitioners become border-thinkers disrupting state logics, becoming supportive friends to mothers and families, and reclaiming traditions and practices of community and social justice work. In many ways their praxis works in, against, and beyond the confines of professional categories of social work and the figure of the social worker, opening possibilities for a radical community practice which prefigures an "other" practice and subject of an emergent politics that is multiple.

These processes of emergent political possibility resonate with a feminism in decolonizing praxis for they nurture, and are enabled by, processes of critical intimacy in which we collectively and collaboratively experiment with prefigurative epistemologies and methodologies of the storyteller. As Lugones (1992: 33) describes, summarizing the practice of Gloria Anzaldúa, "the against-the grain storyteller pushes against the limits of oppression" through fostering dialogue between and within the multiple moments and places of the colonial difference. In this way the storytellers of decolonizing critique (both outsiders-within formal education and organizers within and of the community) become part of a new epistemological terrain "toward a newness of be-ing... incarnating a weave from the fractured locus that constitutes a creative, peopled recreation" (Lugones, 2010: 754).

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APPENDIX 1

World Café at a glance: (<http://www.theworldcafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cafe-To-Go-Revised.pdf>)

- Seat four (five max) people at small Café-style tables or in conversation clusters.
- Set up progressive (at least three) rounds of conversation, approximately 20 minutes each.
- Engage questions or issues that genuinely matter to your life, work, or community.
- Encourage participants to write, doodle and draw key ideas on their tablecloths (and/ or note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the center of the table).
- Upon completing the initial round of conversation, you may ask one person to remain at the table as a “table host” for the next round, while the others serve as travelers or “ambassadors of meaning.” The travelers carry key ideas, themes and questions into

their new conversations, while the table host welcomes the new set of travelers.

- By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect. At the end of the second or third round, all of the tables or conversation clusters in the room will be cross-pollinated with insights from prior conversations.
- In the last round of conversation, people can return to their rest table to synthesize their discoveries, or they may continue traveling to new tables.
- You may use the same question for one or more rounds of conversation, or you may pose different questions in each round to build on and help deepen the exploration.
- After at least three rounds of conversation, initiate a period of sharing discoveries & insights in a whole group conversation. It is in these town meeting-style conversations that patterns can be identified, collective knowledge grows, and possibilities for action emerge.

APPENDIX 2

(<http://www.chriscorrigan.com/openspace/whatisos.html>)

Open Space Technology has been defined as:

- a simple, powerful way to catalyze effective working conversations and truly inviting organizations -- to thrive in times of swirling change.
- a methodological tool that enables self-organizing groups of all sizes to deal with hugely complex issues in a very short period of time.
- a powerful group process that supports positive transformation in organizations, increases productivity, inspires creative solutions, improves communication and enhances collaboration.
- the most effective process for organizations and communities to identify critical issues, voice to their passions and concerns, learn from each other, and, when appropriate, take collective responsibility for finding solutions.

The goal of an Open Space Technology meeting is to create time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues of concern to them. The agenda is set by people with the power and desire to see it through, and typically, Open Space meetings result in transformative experiences for the individuals and groups involved.

What does Open Space look like?

A meeting room prepared for Open Space has a circle of chairs in the middle, letters or numbers around the room to indicate meeting locations, a blank wall that will become the agenda and a news wall for recording and posting the results of the dialogue sessions.

Essentially an Open Space meeting proceeds along the following process:

- Group convenes in a circle and is welcomed by the sponsor. The facilitator provides an overview of the process and explains how it works.
- Facilitator invites people with issues of concern to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of quarter size flip chart paper and announce it to the group. These people are “conveners.”
- The convener places their paper on the wall and chooses a time and a place to meet. This process continues until there are no more agenda items.
- The group then breaks up and heads to the agenda wall, by now covered with a variety of sessions. Participants take note of the time and place for sessions they want to be involved in.
- Dialogue sessions convene for the balance of the meeting. Records determined by each group capture the important points and post the reports on the news wall. All of these reports will be rolled into one document by the end of the meeting.
- Following a closing or a break, the group might move into convergence, a process that takes the issues that have been discussed and attaches action plans to them to “get them out of the room.”

The group then finishes the meeting with a closing circle where people are invited to share comments, insights, and commitments arising from the process.

Sexual and Spiritual R-Evolution through Animism: The Feminine Semiotics of Puppetry

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Abstract

The following article interprets resistant representational strategies of the feminine through animism based creative practices such as puppetry. Acknowledging critical issues at the heart of identity, representation and embodiment in South Africa today, the Feminine Semiotics of animism seek new pathways to imagining feminine form, theory and being. Liminality, multigenicity, leakage and permeability are key to understanding the embodied surfaces of the Feminine Semiotic as it arises in animist puppetry practices. Puppetry reveals itself as a sentient tool that simultaneously exposes the constructs of being whilst engaging in what could be described as a performative alchemy of imagination and form. The Feminine Semiotics of puppetry offer a representational strategy for syncretic identities in a complex marriage between content and form, intersections of metaphor and critique, surface and innovation represented through the thresholds of animist practices. In the 21st century, women's puppetry is emerging as a means to push the margins of complex political and sexual discourse as the language of the feminine body expressed in her multiplicitous identities and sexualities of resistance. The article interprets the syncretic, threshold spaces of creative practice through the theories of filmmaker and cultural theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha (1987) and what she terms the "inappropriate other" that characterizes the emergent third in feminine representation. Through the expression of the inappropriate other, identities of difference recreate, deconstruct and refract each other, rather than simply replicating or resisting traditional conventions (Minh-ha, 1987). Puppetry, as the emergent third in this light, may lead to alchemy in practice, expressed between the surfaces of women's identity in critique and creativity. The practices of two significant female artists, Nandipha Mntambo and Jill Joubert, explore the sexual and political intersectionality of animism in sculptural and puppetry practices. Contemporary animism-based creative practices are shown to proffer strategies for

expansive creative distillations that provide new trajectories for feminine resistance and empowerment.

The Feminine Semiotics of Puppetry: Towards an Emergent Third

We are interstitial creatures and border citizens by nature – insiders/ outsiders at the same time – and we rejoice in this paradoxical condition. In the act of crossing a border, we find temporary emancipation. (Gómez-Peña, 2001)

In the 21st century, women's puppetry practices are emerging to push the margins of political, cultural and sexual identities. Pre-figurative and pro-creative artistic practices such as puppetry can provide women with tools for both complex expression and creative plurality, which this article unpacks specifically in light of their significance as a feminizing, de-colonizing form of artistic resistance. I explore how animism-based creative practices such as puppetry can evoke critical and contentious languages of a co-constructive femininity in strategies of resistance today. Writing on critical creative and political approaches to the re-invention of resistance, Sara Motta (2014: 11) insists that it is not only a necessity but our responsibility to re-imagine emancipatory politics within feminizing, decolonizing approaches that foster the creation of ourselves and our world differently.

Animism and puppetry offer multiple pathways into re-imagining epistemology through embodied, pre-figurative knowledge systems that, as I will explore, engage multiple levels of meaning, sentience and aesthetics simultaneously. In light of the feminization of resistance set forth by Motta (2013), I articulate this complex approach to exploring multiplex identity through emancipatory artistic practices such as puppetry as a Feminine Semiotic. The Feminine Semiotic is a critical as well as embodied approach to interpreting the potential of animist practices as resistant feminine creativity. It is a proposal for creative, critical strategy that addresses the spaces of the sacred feminine, liminality, flux, excess and transformation held within puppetry practices.

Puppetry is one of the oldest forms of multidisciplinary creative practice. As an artistic and cultural phenomenon, puppetry has found its way through antiquity to the present day in many countries across the world. Taking its roots from animism, puppetry is performance that seeks the life within *things*. As a creative and discursive discipline in its own right, puppetry posits the performative object and performing *things* at the forefront of artistic practices as well as critical discourses. Puppets combine anthropomorphic imagination and magical thinking with the plastic arts, materials, objects and the form of things which

serve both as important metaphors and tangible expressions of our continually changing understanding of what it means to be human. They emerge as vital artistic elements at times when we question and reconceive longstanding paradigms about human beings and our relationship to the inanimate world, offering concrete means of playing with new embodiments of humanity. (Posner, Orenstein and Bell, 2014: 2)

Masks and figurines have been used throughout the African continent in myriad diverse contexts (Joubert, 2006). Indeed, there are many masking, doll and figurine traditions that have evolved to meet the particular needs of various societies and transformed into contemporary modes of expression. A key to the revitalization of puppetry and its import in contemporary performance practices is its potential for interdisciplinarity. Puppetry exists through combinations of the performing and plastic arts and cannot be clearly confined into any one category. At its core, it combines the kinesthetic and the constructed object/form with multiple layers of meaning-making, metaphor and symbolism.

Puppetry's status as an underdog to the acknowledged separatist practices of performance and fine art posits itself on the thresholds of categorization and legitimization. It exists in a state of collaboration, hybridity and liminality. This multiplicity also places it in a shared position of marginality to dominant discourse, as an inappropriate other of the performance and art worlds. Today in South Africa, the term Puppetry is often loosely incorporated into the interstructural category of *Visual Performance*. The genre offers an entry point to contemporary performance

and it arises in many different modes such as performance art, movement, theatre, multimedia and storytelling, amongst others.

Puppetry is a threshold, border practice concerned with creative multidisciplinary that could provide a potentially resistant representation of the subaltern feminine. The Feminine Semiotics of puppetry offer a representational strategy for syncretic identities in a complex marriage between content and form, metaphor and critique, surface and innovation, as represented through the emergent “third” spaces of animist practices. The trajectories of embodied, original, and imaginative practices offer theoretical excess that I believe is crucial to exploring South African women’s creativity. They invoke the liminal and inappropriate other in narratives of complex feminine experience.

The Feminine Semiotic arises as a term that embraces postcolonial and feminist cultural theory in order to re-imagine where materialist and radical divisions might meet with puppetry and animism, and to imagine embodied knowledge strategies for feminine performance in South Africa today. I develop the terminology of the Feminine Semiotic from the transgressive body of the *female imaginary* proposed by radical feminist theorists Hélène Cixous (1976) and Luce Irigaray (1985), integrating Julia Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic as that which disrupts the order of the masculine symbolic (1982). I align it to the converging materialist/radical underpinnings of Sue Ellen Case’s *new poetics* (1998) as well as Geraldine Harris and Elaine Aston’s search for “embodied knowledge” as a paradigm for knowing (2008). I also most importantly interpret this re-designation of the libidinal feminine body of desire within the “third” space of the inappropriate other as set forth by Trinh T. Minh-ha within a postcolonial feminist framework. It is my aligning of these concepts which has guided my understanding of the creative research at play in women’s puppetry practices and the complex interplays of meaning and subversion in these art forms.

French theorist Julia Kristeva has advanced a feminist position on feminine sexual signification by re-interpreting the word “semiotic” into a Post-Lacanian theoretical approach to analyzing the construction of sexuality and division. This re-reading of the term provides a feminist distinction between what Kristeva interprets as the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*, and the resultant signification composed of these two binary elements.

Kelly Oliver describes the semiotic element of Kristeva's theory as the interpretation of libidinal bodily drives associated with the rhythms, tones and kinetics of signifying practices. It is a "discharge of drives" (Oliver, 1998: 2) linked to the maternal body which creates her semiotics as a destabilizing, feminized element of representation. The symbolic aspect of signification for Kristeva is linked to the grammar, rigidity and structure of reference and language. For Kristeva, the imaginary/semiotic can never be clearly separated from the symbolic/thetic, but always operates to destabilize the process of subjectification. The stasis of structuralist approaches to cultural production poses a problem for Kristeva whose theories of subjectivity look towards the potential heterogeneity of subjective experience, rather than the fixity of homogeneity in language and consciousness (Moi, 1985: 166).

South African cultural theorist Sarah Nuttall asks, how do we de-segregate critical thinking and artistic practice in order to explore the interwoven aspects of South African women's identity at play today (2010)? The complex trajectories and constant entwinements of subaltern feminine identity require more in-depth exploration in creative practice, what Nuttall calls a "thinking across from the inside" (Nuttall, 2010). In order to avoid the pitfalls of reductionism, we cannot assume a feminine biologism or category of the feminine, outside of the complex intersectionalities of gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, caste, age, nationality and other complex components of identity. The fundamentalism of a concept of "woman" is one that has haunted the western feminist movement with exclusionism on multiple levels. Post-colonial, transnational and subaltern feminism since the early 1980's has confronted western feminist theory's failure to adequately account for racial and cultural difference in its critical approaches. Criticism of the universalizing essentialism and biological determinism of the concept of "woman" and "feminine" is inherent in any assertion of a universal femininity and language. The concern is centered in the racial dynamics and "habits" of privilege, which have perpetuated and established many dominant social ideologies and prejudices across feminized movements that privilege white subjectivities (Garrett, 2002: 40). Positions of otherness in the dynamics of separation are always reinforced in reference to the non-other, the insider, the privileged subject of discourse (Spivak, 1988).

The theories of film-maker and postcolonial cultural theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha inspire my research through what she terms the *inappropriate other* that characterizes an emergent third space in women's creative practices (Minh-ha, 1987). Minh-ha posits the theory of an “inappropriate other” as a cultural and artistic strategy for transformative approaches to feminine representation (Minh-ha, 1987). The moment the (artist) woman changes her position from insider to out, she stands in an ambiguous and complex space as neither subject nor other (Minh-ha, 1987). This position as an “inappropriate other” both inhabits and confounds liminality. It illuminates difference while subversively straddling both the inside and the outside of coherent identities.

The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer just an insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking from the inside out. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. (Minh-ha, 1987: 3)

In this dynamic, the artist always has “two gestures... that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference...” (Minh-ha, 1987: 3). In the body of the inappropriate other, definitions of clear-cut difference are destabilized and reinvented. The body expresses both separation and multiplicity. It is both defined and ill-defined, where boundaries become unstable and in the telling of her (the individual woman's) experience “she knows she cannot speak of ‘them’ without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story” (Minh-ha, 1987: 3).

The inappropriate other offers a feminine vehicle to meet Homi K. Bhabha's exploration of hybridity and third space in postcolonial discourse. Hybridity has been a highly problematic term in postcolonial theory, but it has also occupied a central place within it (Meredith, 1998). Hybridity, according to Bhabha, is the process by which colonialism attempts to homogenize difference by translating it into a singular translation model, “but then fails producing something familiar but new” (Papastergiadis, 1997). This new, unexpected and resistant element is what Bhabha termed “third space”, emerging from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and colonized, self and other, challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity (Mer-

edith, 1998). The hybrid third space complicates racial stereotyping and negativity by subverting essentialist and oppressive discourses within and without their own failing languages. The failure of essentialism to contain the third space throws all attempts to essentialize subject-position and identity into disrepute.

Minh-ha calls for a renegotiation of difference, difference “that is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness” (Minh-ha, 1987: 2). Perception of difference, in this paradigm, can operate as a mode of complex signifiers and contexts, in which it does not give rise to conflict merely through separatism, where difference is “beyond and alongside conflict” (Minh-ha, 1987: 2).

Many of us still hold on to the concept of difference, not as a tool of creativity to question multiple forms of repression and dominance, but as a tool of segregation, to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences. The apartheid type of difference. (Minh-ha, 1987: 2)

Minh-ha insists that we refuse the presumption that an insider can only speak with authority about their own culture (Minh-ha, 1987). Such presumptions of exclusive and legitimized knowledge imply that the outsider posits himself or herself as the all-knowing subject of the outside environment, from which the insider is essentially excluded (Minh-ha, 1987). In this dynamic, the oppressive hierarchies between “us” and “them”, subject and object, self and other, remain. Minh-ha declares this process as a paradoxical twist of the colonial mind (Minh-ha, 1987: 3). The insider may be granted the power of legitimacy, as long as it informs the standardizing of difference between insider/out, as long as it informs the all-knowing subject of colonial discourse (Minh-ha, 1987). The other in this dynamic is always the “shadow of the self” and thus is never concrete, never stable, never subject, never really “all knowing” (Minh-ha, 1987: 3). This positioning denies the intersections of binary recourse to facilitate suture, rupture or new surfaces for meaning. Authorship in this dynamic is concerned with the power of validation and legitimacy that essentialist divisions such as stereotyping seem to insist upon (Minh-ha, 1987).

A proposal for a truly resistant Feminine Semiotics then, it would seem, requires a reading of cultural signification that embraces the plu-

rality of “subject”, destabilizing the inherent homogeneity of the symbolic. Representation through an inappropriate other in this light may lead to an alchemy of practice that is able to birth the new surfaces of women’s performance, new surfaces of the female body and psyche in representation. Representation becomes a process of alchemy that requires that artists create “a ground that belongs to no one... Otherness becomes empowerment, critical difference when it is not given, but re-created” (Minh-ha, 1987: 3).

Puppetry derived from animist thinking and practice, in its own right, facilitates meeting points of diverse elements, the purpose of which may or may not be to intentionally render sutures in dominant discourse, but which through their very intersections express the complexity of identity today. The gesture of multiplicity inherent to the form and meaning of puppetry holds great significance for expressing the difficult, multiplicitous and entangled pathways of South African women’s experiences and identities at play in the social, economic and political landscapes of the country. With the global resurgence of scholarly interest in puppetry, there has been a proliferation of writing that considers *why* the art form holds such power and potential within the contemporary creative arts and material performance. William Kentridge speaks of the artifice of puppetry, and asks:

What is it in us that can watch a carved piece of wood, see its manipulation, be aware of this the whole time and still be unable to stop seeing a transformation of the object (Kentridge, 2001: 2).

This statement highlights the complex ambiguity of intimacy and alienation that puppetry brings to performance. It begins to elucidate the mechanisms of complex performance wherein the audience is simultaneously aware that what they are watching is a construct of the manipulator, but that the puppet exists for them in and because of its materiality and capacity for sentience (Kentridge, 2001). The subversive potential that puppetry offers strategies of representation of the feminine is its ability to transgress boundaries of subjectivity through the construct of the puppet itself in relation to the body and imagination. It is also the ability of puppetry to involve the audience in subtle ways, to contribute to its creation through their own suspension of disbelief, that makes the medium so effective.

Theorist Jane Taylor says:

Puppets can provide an extraordinary dimension to a theatrical project... because every gesture is, as it were, metaphorized. The puppet draws attention to its own artifice, and we as the audience willingly submit ourselves to the ambiguous processes that at once deny and assert the reality of what we watch. (Taylor, 1998: vii)

The puppet always exists through multiple levels of meaning and signification. The puppet exists through plurality, through the interplay of multiple bodies as a co-constructed reality between objects, performers and community. These occur in the structure, form and symbolism of the object itself. They also manifest in the multiple bodies held in the puppeteer/puppet relationship and then the puppet/puppeteer/audience relationship. In many instances, more than one performer is required to operate a puppet, so the bodies speak to multiple points of reference operating in the singular subject. Through the body of the performed puppet, deliberate attention is brought to the inherent multiplicity of being that facilitates life.

The approach to puppetry in this instance displays how multiple levels of difference and experience can shift between the bodies of the individual, the object and the community in the artistic process. In the multiplicity of representation, complex identities recreate, deconstruct and refract each other, rather than simply replicating or resisting traditional conventions. The use of puppetry allows the possibilities of artifice to co-exist with transformational sentient kinesiology in performance and improvisation. Puppetry has the potential to simultaneously present and disrupt the body just as it disrupts static audience identification with the object/subject of performance. It troubles character as well as notions of the gaze of the audience, complicating their identifications through patriarchal notions of sexuality and gender.

Puppetry, as the melding and meeting point of various surfaces and bodies of meaning and construct, may be seen as representative of an emergent third in this light. It is these multiple performing differences that converge in the puppet that render it an inappropriate other, as that which both expresses and confounds construct and being, visually and critically bridging inside and outside, critique and aesthetic, binary and

liminality. Puppetry reveals itself as a sentient tool that simultaneously exposes the constructs of being in the sculpted, created form (morph) and the performing feminine body, whilst engaging in what I can only express as a performative alchemy of presence and embodiment (forces, power, abjection, creation and decay, sentience, emotion).

Puppetry, Animism and Resistant Femininities

There is an inaccurate assumption that puppetry as it arises in South Africa today is derived from European art forms and that there are no indigenous puppetry traditions in South Africa (Joubert, 2010; Kruger, 2014). This is, I believe, largely due to issues around classification, genre and epistemological categories in western puppet-theatre. What makes an object a puppet and what makes it a figurine, a fetish or a doll? Similarly, in light of this article on the Feminine Semiotic, we may ask, what constitutes the feminine and how are the categories of femininity created? What limits and homogenization do these categories bring to bear on radical identity and creative practices? Can we clearly state what a puppet is and is not, and is this classification relevant to explorations of resistant, subaltern feminine identity playing out in radical contemporary animist practices?

Leading puppet theorists such as Penny Francis would argue that what clearly distinguishes puppetry tradition as a category is that puppets are primarily theatrical in function and are fabricated specifically to serve in puppet theatre (Kruger, 2014). Marie Kruger writes at length about the classification of contemporary puppetry and the difficulties of genre. The complex strands and contemporary occurrences of puppet theatre become entangled with other categories such object theatre, multimedia and visual performance to name a few. Yet these categories themselves are lightly held in the multi-textual field of performance studies, a highly contentious and much-debated area of scholarship in which the parameters of classification and genre are unstable and volatile at best (Kershaw, 2009).

Kruger explores Jurkowski's description that puppet theatre differentiates itself from live theatre, as the main and basic features of puppetry are the speaking and performing objects "which make use of the physical sources of the vocal and driving powers that are present beyond

the object (Jurkowski, 1988, p. 31)” (Kruger, 2014: 4). The concept of the puppet as a performing figure driven by “powers beyond the object” is significant in light of an exploration of the animist origins of puppetry. Jurkowski writes ardently of the incorporation of puppetry and its different social, religious and political functions in societies throughout history. Objects, things and the matter of early man have been linked to magic, the religious and the mimetic (Jurkowski, 1988).

Professor of history and anthropology of religion, Tord Olsson, writes about animist ritual performance practices in Mali, Northern Africa, specifically those of the Bambara, who are considered to incorporate their own indigenous puppetry traditions in specifically fetish-based practices. Here the fetish-object is used to ritually “conjure” the presence of persons who are now ancestors. Olsson writes about how this creation of *presence*, central to fetishism and also central to puppetry, as Jurkowski insists, is a complicated theoretical part of understanding performance (be it in the form of entertainment, ritual or personal practice). It is this invisible *presence*, which allows the fetish to affect and “alter moods, social relations, bodily dispositions and states of mind” (Schieffelin, 1998 quoted in Olsson, 2013: 194). Olsson writes of a ritual presence in Malian fetish practices and puppetry in which there is no discernment between ritual object and person, living or dead, or other-than human, nor is there a distinction between the performer in the mask and the mask itself. “In meta ritual discourses one sometimes says that the fetish–person arrives at his object, at other times one says that the fetish person issues from his object” (Olsson, 2013: 323).

Kruger has explored the links between ritual performance and African puppetry tradition in her writing on the use of puppetry in the *Gelede* masquerades of Yoruba communities in Nigeria and Benin. The traditions offer entry points to multidisciplinary ritual performance, which challenges the boundaries of traditional western puppetry practices. Kruger’s scholarship explores how puppets serve as “agents for the transmission and preservation of social concepts”, which is done through customary public rituals that serve both to entertain and to express social criticism and control. The puppets are used in magic-religious ceremonies and healing rituals, such as the annual *Gelede* festival during the dry season. Here the boundaries between ritual and theatre

begin to blur, and as Kruger asserts, public puppet ritual takes the form of theatre. This theatre serves as entertainment but also to impart and define social roles, structures and belief systems specifically around feminine procreative power.

It is significant to note that the Gelede puppetry traditions evident in masquerade ritual performances represent what Kruger calls a highly visible, artistic expression of the Yoruba's belief in the power of women. These puppets, which are in fact figures built on to the top of masks used primarily in dancing, are used in service and honor of the feminine. They are "staged on every imaginable occasion, from a simple act of housewarming to elaborate funeral ceremonies" (Kruger, 2016: 3). The Gelede performances are offered as sacrifices to honor the female elders of the community and are also highly linked to women's procreative importance. Kruger says that in this belief system, it is held that women, particularly the elderly, "possess certain extraordinary powers equal to or greater than those of the gods and ancestors – a view that is reflected in praises acknowledging them as 'our mothers', 'the gods of society', and 'the owners of the world'" (Kruger, 2016: 4). She explores the origins of the word *Gelede* as offered by Drewal, which refers to the placation, adoration and respect of women's sexual power and sexual bodies. Thus the Gelede ritual puppetry performances form part of an elaborate worship of the feminine and the benefit of her powers for the whole community (Drewal, 1990 cited in Kruger, 2016: 5).

If contemporary puppets are only considered puppets if used in occidental theatrical contexts, we begin to homogenize and limit much more complex and politically challenging renderings of the practice. Feminism has tackled issues of visibility and invisibility in theory and politics, particularly by reclaiming the political spaces of the personal by women of multiple races. Critical race and gender practitioners working with theories and processes of intersectionality such as Audre Lorde (1997) have acknowledged the connections between personal experience and the larger social and political structures of gender and race. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw has written of the necessity to recognize "the social and systemic in what was formerly perceived as isolated and individual" in the identity politics of women, people of color, gays and lesbians, or anybody considered "other" (Crenshaw, 1991: 1241). Thus

by looking only toward the public theatrical occurrences of puppetry practice, we negate inappropriate other spaces, third spaces, where feminine forms of puppetry might arise.

Women's figurine traditions arising from Southern Africa are mostly ignored, prescribed in general to tourist craft, women's and girl's material traditions, and loosely delegated to the personal, domestic space of "dolls". Elizabeth Dell explains the ceremonial use of fertility figures specifically associated with feminine identity and sexual maturation in representation across Southern Africa (1998). There seems to be a dualistic function of these objects. The first function serves as a socializing play tool for young girls, allowing them to mimic their mother's breastfeeding and nurturing (Dell, 1998). Yet dolls and children's dolls "provoke difficulties in their classification because the child's fantasy gives them special psychological functions, thus placing them on the ritualistic and especially animistic level... the endowment of life to a dead thing" (Jurkowski, 1988: 144).

Dell explores the different instances in which the figurines, often bisexual in form (combining female and male symbolism) function across the life spans of women. They do not just represent wished for babies, but also represent women when they reach child bearing age and menstruation, serve as tools of sexual instruction to initiates, and are used for social education and the processes of feminine maturation. They are also very specific tools for adult ritual performance dealing with "imagination and projection". "The latter can function as intermediaries between living and dead, between women and their powers to reproduce... a system of metaphorical thought centering around fertility" (Dell, 1998: 13). Figurine and "doll" practices, such as those of the Venda in South Africa, sit deeply and resonantly within multisexual, gender political symbolism, feminine rites of passage and sexual knowledges that are very hidden from masculine, western epistemologies and discourses. My hunch is that many more politically resonant domestic "puppetry" rituals stemming from feminine empowerment traditions survive in deeply resilient and resistant personal practices by women in the subaltern.

South African puppetry's origins in animist creative practices provide fertile entry points into this primarily embodied art form. As I have established, puppetry has a unique ability to facilitate an interdisciplinary

meeting place of construct and sentience. Animism brings to the fore the resistant and interstitial potential of play, ritual and imagination that feeds puppetry practices. It offers invisible entry points to play and ritual deeply concerned with a new way of being in the world. It is the symbiotic potential of everything and everyone around, within, above and below, everything with which humanity shares this universe, of form and sentience that is the heart of animism. Animism holds open the doors of not just an alternative resistance to the destructive segregations of hegemonic discourse and systems, but of living awareness of the fluidity of boundaries so crucial to revisioning identity, sexuality, self, environment and being in the 21st century. Radical feminine modes of knowing through embodied (pro)creativity as well as dissolution, align to animist impulses where “materials of all sorts, with various and variable properties, and enlivened by the forces of the cosmos, mix and meld with one another in the generation of things” (Ingold, 2014: 294).

Secularisation has resulted in the brutal damming up of puppetry’s mainsprings of dramaturgy, which arose from the medium’s natural affinity to things spiritual, to ritual, religious ceremony, fear of the otherworldly and the inexplicable... Animism has been stifled, and animism...is the stuff of puppetry... (Francis, 2007: 7)

This statement draws us back to the non-secular, unseen and categorically ambivalent aspects of puppetry. The classification of puppetry, when we consider its origins in magical thinking, always veers towards a natural crossing of boundaries, an intermingling of forms, functions and imagination.

Recently there has been a resurgence of scholarly interest in the philosophy, concept and theories of animism and its specific occurrence and influence across the world today (Harvey, 2014). Anthony Kubiak describes the animistic worldview as one that is inherently performative at its core, expressing and embodying what he calls “the relational personness” of all manner of entities in the world (2012). This relationality is highly significant to the emergent third of the Feminine Semiotic in that it expresses an interstitial place, both defined by the surfaces of form and permeable to the forces of imagination, memory, myth, spirit, emotion and being. Anthony Kubiak writes about a world that:

... Is always-becoming, a world actualized and realized as process through the performance of *life*. To live in such a world demands that one be constantly alive to the place of others and otherness, that one continually express one's respect and gratitude to Otherness itself, simply because this is what opens us out into the Other and empties the self... (Kubiak, 2012: 58)

Perhaps the problem is that the very real potential of animism is actually something more than what we perceive with our eyes, but which we can feel *is* there. This makes it critically and epistemologically volatile and resistant to empirical discourse. Kubiak states that what is at stake in animism is a turn away from categorical closures, subjectivities and systematizations, favoring an awareness of “becomings, of processes, of interdependencies at the level of thought, but also at the level of experience” (Kubiak, 2012: 57). Animism has been stigmatized in language and thought as a religious belief system, but anthropologists today write about new animism, that is animism understood in phenomenological terms as an integrative and interrelational understanding of life, which Tord Olsson says is inhabited by a number of persons, only some of which are human and living (Olsson, 2013: 317).

It is this exciting potential of animism as a continuous, ever-porous and mutable process, that expresses the inherent relationality and permeability of nature and life itself. It also speaks to the flux and porosity of categories that the Feminine Semiotics of puppetry seeks to render present. Infused with what Kubiak calls an attitude, a stance of openness, of awareness and appreciation, animism can be a conscious enactment and performance. In this performance, all things can be perceived to co-create one another in an ever-arising, “unending reciprocity between entities”, that allows each the space of their own unfolding, their freedom to be (Kubiak, 2012: 58).

The Feminine Semiotic in the Living Sculpture of Nandipha Mntambo

South African sculptor Nandipha Mntambo, in her solo exhibition *The Encounter* (2009), uses her own body as a catalyst for radical animist expression, which I would consider to be a particularly Feminine Semiotic.

Mntambo herself has declared that the biggest misconception about her work is that it has a feminist agenda at its core. She speaks of her interest in pushing the boundaries of attraction and repulsion, body and materiality in an interview with Natasha Madzika. She says, “I’ve always been interested in challenging our understanding of boundaries, pushing that thin line that exists between attraction/repulsion, animal/human, and male/female. It’s wonderful that my intentions are clear within how my work is read” (2012). Mntambo’s sculpture and imagery blurs the visual and material boundaries of the seen and unseen, self and other, masculine and feminine, western and African, through what I would like to term living animist sculpture.

Mntambo would not classify her work as “puppetry”, especially as puppetry is stigmatized as a Western “craft” practice. This refers back to the stigma of “puppetry” as popular, rather than high art. In many respects, female artists fight constantly to be recognized as significant contributors to contemporary artistic practice and discourse (Aston and Harris, 2008). In identifying a Feminine Semiotics within animist practices, I feel that it is significant to locate and identify where animism is practiced by female artists specifically concerned with the permeability of sexual boundaries and the multiple presences of desire, as Mntambo herself has attested to. I do feel that there is value in recognizing and exploring the complex feminine interplay of highly visible animist elements within Mntambo’s work. As a scholar and puppetry artist myself concerned with uncovering the potential Feminine Semiotics at play in puppetry, I offer a co-creative reading of how animism may potentially be interpreted within Mntambo’s artwork.

The invocation of multiple, multi-sexual presences and persons in Mntambo’s sculptures, through my own creative gaze, correlates to the visible and invisible “presences” conjured in other African fetish and puppetry traditions such as those of the Bambara and the Venda. These presences are the foodstuffs of puppetry’s non-secular and counter-epistemological powers. Mntambo’s living sculptures, in my reading of their visceral impact, play intimately with the seen and unseen of the object-fetish-form, invoking highly present personalities in their morphology. It is also what I perceive as the movement of permeability, melding and transmutation that elicits for me, as a puppetry practitioner, an awareness

of the living aspects evident in Mntambo's sculpture. This living, artistic gesture of permeability, in which the boundaries of self and other mutate, invites the viewer as well as the artist into a creative process deeply concerned with a new way of being in the world, a way of being where "in favour of dissolution, ... I enter into the other as the other enters into me in a symbiosis" (Kubiak, 2012: 57).

The boundaries of coherent masculine identity, as well as the subversion of the masculine, is made highly visible through Mntambo's reclamation and re-working of cowhide – a traditional product of cattle agriculture and patriarchal economic power. Thembisa Waetjen writes of rural patriarchal agrarian economies implemented by the Nguni people of South Africa where "the raising, herding, and exchange of cattle in particular, were exclusively male concerns... accompanied by an elaborate system of gendered taboos and rituals" (2004: 37). Mntambo radically shifts and re-appropriates the symbol of the bull by intimately re-shaping cowhide with her own naked body. In her sculptural animism, she provides new ways of seeing multi-layered processes of being and experience through the feminine. She invokes a cross-cultural symbolism of the bull through a series of sculptures, videos and photographs wherein her body becomes the vehicle for the revision of desire and presence. In these sculptures, not only does Mntambo subvert traditional patriarchal cross-cultural images, but she also reclaims the role of South African women as the producers of living sculpture traditions. Through her multimedia performance and sculptural works, she immerses her own embodied, sexual presences in highly specific cross-gender, intercultural images and interspecies iconographies. Mfundu Vundla (2012: 2) writes of his encounter with the work:

One walks through the exhibition hearing multiple polyrhythmic narratives from a cowhide drum. The artist's percussive voice takes us through a range of emotions: aggression, anger, submission, self-love, self-hate, ecstasy, the need for sanctuary... in a society such as ours in which women are too often regarded as second class citizens... Mntambo's feminist concerns are, in my view, tangents from the spine of her aesthetics which possess an undercurrent of the spiritual.

In this exhibition, Mntambo hangs and positions moulds of her

own female body, cast in cowhide in various tableaux in the exhibition room. These cowhide body casts are set in various actions of movement, suspended in the moment of kinesis, which in my own reading of their suspension is anything but static or dead. The living sculptures call presence into the body casts, inhabited by the unseen persons and other than persons evoked in their mimetic forms. In the one tableau of sculptures called *emabutfo* (the name for traditional Swazi male warriors), multiple cowhide bodies are suspended from the ceiling in military lines. Here Mntambo confronts the “demarcation of war as male territory” by revisioning cultural icons of aggression and fighting through the feminized, animist body (Vundla, 2012: 2). She does this in another sculpture, a single cowhide cast in the shape of her body, which opens into a voluminous skirt surrounded by cow hooves. Entitled *Nandikeshvara*, the title evokes Hindu mythology in the Sanskrit Nandi, the name of the holy bull, which serves as the mount of the god Shiva and as the gatekeeper of the god and goddess Shiva and Parvati. The aligning of the bull to masculine spiritual power is reimaged in the feminine sensuality of the image, which is cast from Mntambo’s naked torso, highlighting her bare breasts. This is further articulated by the proximity of three truncated cowhide bodies kneeling in prayer, in the presence of a huge cowhide *uMcedo*, a Swazi women’s fertility/pregnancy hut (Vundla, 2009: 2).

Animism, according to writer Tim Ingold, is an invitation, not to a way of thought or discourse, but one of being alive to the world. It requires sensitivity and responsiveness in our perceptions to the permeability and change of everything around humanity (Ingold, 2013: 294). It is also a re-membling of our inextricable interrelationship to the world in all of her myriad occurrences, human and other-than-human. Thus, the relationality of animism is not limited to the human being as a separate form of existence. Mntambo’s imagery in my experience and understanding of the animist elements, walks these thresholds by creating potent interspecies images and mythological personalities, which render the unitary form of the masculine body and reality within the flux of the Feminine Semiotic.

In a series of photographs and sculptures, Mntambo defiantly confronts us as a hybrid human-animal called *Europa*, who then also transforms into the narcissist and rapist *Zeus*, immortalized in a confronta-

tional bronze bust. These interspecies, multisexual representations are a reworking of the ancient Greek myth of the abduction and rape of Europa by Zeus. Mntambo merges her bare torso and head with the horns of a bull, creating herself as a female minotaur, literally sculpting her living flesh into a powerful interspecies expression of ferocious feminine presence. The trauma of sexual violence enacted on Europa by Zeus is inverted into a highly reflexive shift in their respective roles in this event.

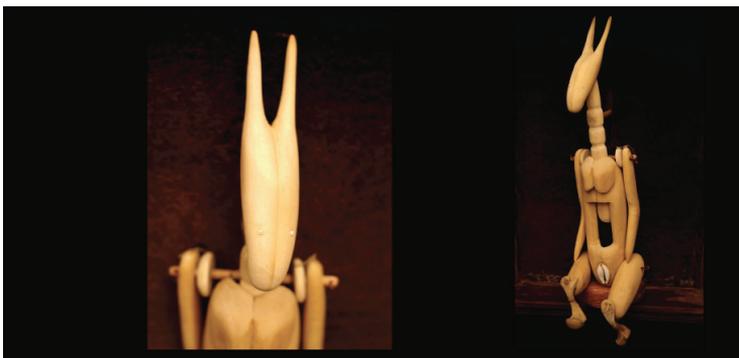


Europa, from *The Encounter* Exhibition by Nandipha Mntambo, Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town 2008.

Mntambo creates an image of complex ambiguity, a third space in which Mntambo holds both the gaze of desire and sexual aggression, as well as the receptive body of victim and participant. In this semiotic gesture, I interpret both the victim and the attacker within the image, inviting the third space of the audience into a complex and intriguing subversion of feminine vulnerability, weakness and sexual desire. In Mntambo's sculpture and multimedia work, I read a confrontation between the visual and mythic borders of hegemony, of social order as well as the body (as a microcosm of those ideologies). I also witness the ability of sculptural form, traditionally perceived as a stationary creative process, to

visually and metaphorically reveal new statuses of being in the artworks where traditional representation is exceeded by living presence. Through this, I interpret what animism offers explorations of sexual identity, in a powerful evocation of the third, of the unspecified and unknown within creative practice. My writing and reception of Mntambo's creations in this light seeks out the Feminine Semiotics held within the latent animism and exploration of presence in her work.

Jill Joubert's *Apple Girl*



Seated Therianthrope, from Jill Joubert's *Apple Girl*, Cape Town 2012



The Triptych, from Jill Joubert's *Apple Girl*, Cape Town 2012.

Jill Joubert is a contemporary South African puppeteer who has been creating, exploring and performing with puppets since the 1980's. She was a founding member of the world-renowned Handspring Puppet Company in the 1980's and her solo contemporary puppetry work over the past twenty years has been showcased on prestigious platforms such as the Institute for Creative Arts live art platform *Infecting the City*. I would like to offer my own creative interpretations of the Feminine Semiotics at play in one of her most recent productions, *Apple Girl* (2012), created for Joubert's Master's degree which was co-supervised between the separate departments of sculpture (Fine Art) and theatre (Drama) at the University of Cape Town South Africa. Joubert writes in her Master's Thesis that *an Italian fairy-tale of the same name inspired Apple Girl*. The fairytale, she describes, was taken specifically from a feminine folk tradition, in which oral tradition and storytelling was held not by men but by the grandmothers of the community (Joubert, 2012). Joubert describes *Apple Girl* as a ritualized performance that enacts metamorphosis and transformation. The piece was created as a series of performed sculptural tableaux that took the form of various mobile shrines, which she says functioned as "mini puppet theatres" (Joubert, 2012: 6). These mobile shrine/puppet theatres are moved by Joubert through the performance, shaping the space until at the end of the performance they become a "constellation of tableaux as an art work, fixed as an arrangement of sculptures to which the performance has given a framework for presentation and interpretation" (2012: 6).

In informal discussions about the performance, Joubert described to me how her own presence in *Apple Girl* is a performative interaction with each shrine as a moment of ritual. I interpret Joubert's performed rituals as a series of specified, meaningful gestures that echo the fairytale narrative and resonate within the imaginative and critical spaces of the Feminine Semiotic. These spaces arise for me through Joubert's use of presence and symbolism. The ritual shrines in Joubert's performance do this by presenting what I interpret as spatial and metaphoric moments, framed by multicultural symbolic forms in the narrative of the reworked fairytale.

As described in her thesis, Joubert works very closely with African mythologies (from which a vast amount of African ritual figurines

are derived), feminine archetype and mythological iconographies in her sculptural forms in *Apple Girl*. The threshold space that characterizes the Feminine Semiotic emerges in my interpretation through the personal and political, sexual and spiritual landscapes that Joubert's puppetry invokes in *Apple Girl*. I read the Feminine Semiotics of her work, not only in the transformative symbolism of the story itself but in the presence of the living sculptures that express what Joubert describes as her "numinous appreciation of the material world, the objects of which resonate with their many lives once lived" (Joubert, 2010: 8). The found things, built from "scavenged" objects, combine and recombine to form the bodies of the living sculpture. Joubert only uses found materials to carve and create her puppets. As in many African puppetry, mask and figurine traditions (Joubert, 2010) she carves and combines natural, impermanent materials such as bones, wood and shells. The cast-off fragments gathered from various places, express for Joubert the nomadic trajectories of time, place and memory in the historical residue of the things themselves. Importantly, Joubert writes that the objects speak as well to the passage of time in women's sexual identity, most notably her own rite of passage into menopause. In an interview, Joubert described to me how she combines natural found objects such as wood and bone with highly personal materials, such as her mother's wedding dress, her daughter's childhood clothing, items associated with the trajectory of her own sexual and feminine cycles of life, to create transculturally metaphoric puppet forms.

In one of Joubert's tableau shrines, entitled *The Boudoir of the Queen*, the central puppet on the altar is the figure of the infertile Queen, yearning for a child. The wooden Queen figure stands on an adapted bedside table on wheels, with rolling pin handles (echoing cults of western feminine domesticity). Deep red curtains, cut from the clothing of Joubert's own daughter's childhood, surround the table. Joubert describes the Queen as derived from women's fertility and power icons of the snake goddess of ancient Crete "with hair carved to resemble fiery snakes, youthful bare-breasts, small waist and flared skirt, evokes the snake-goddess of Crete... When static, the queen's arms are outstretched in the gesture of grace synonymous with the Virgin Mary" (Joubert, 2010: 52). Thus, Joubert herself situates the puppet of the Queen within non-

secular traditions that used religious icons (catholic) and fertility figurines (prepatriarchal) in ritual and empowerment practices.

According to Vicki Noble, a women's spirituality scholar, states that "much of the earliest art appears to have been created by women in ritual context" (Noble, 1991: 155). Noble's research is highly influenced by the seminal work of Maria Gimbutas who wrote prolifically on ancient feminine art and figurine traditions. Noble aligns women's creative and spiritual practices, which she relates to the sexual significance of the feminine biological fertility cycle. More than this, Noble connects women's figurine practices to sexual and creative empowerment (1991). Joubert's reflection on fertility iconography through the carved figurine can also be contextualized within South African fertility figurine traditions. In South Africa, fertility figures were designed to be moved, carried, performed and used, rather than simply standing still on display. The fertility doll also contained both male and female sexual forms in its representation, in which

Embedded in its design... was a narrative of denial of masculinity. The Doll offered women the opportunity to express, celebrate or teach an autonomous concept of female identity and fertility... There is ample evidence for women's ideological opposition to the patriarchy. (Dederen, 2010: 34)

The fertility figurine brings resistant and subversive practices into women's rites of passage and matrilineal inheritance. Dederen says that many of the fertility "dolls" of these traditions may be seen to express an autonomous feminine perspective of procreation, a feminized rendering of sexuality that served as "an alternative to the masculine vision of sexual complementarity" (2010: 36).

Dederen writes a significant feature is often the dual sexual nature of the icons, which contain references to the sexual identity of both men and women. Dederen looks at the latent feminine empowerment oft-ignored in the Tsonga marriage figurine traditions in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Many researchers simply dismiss their importance by attributing their purposes as reminders of the sanctity of marriage to newlyweds and, by implication, the male privileging patriarchal

systems surrounding them. But rather than the doll being referred to as a child (*n'wana*) by women, it is also called *xanga* and *tsbutshu*, words that hold great significance in women-led lineage traditions. The *xanga* figurine arises in complex ways through the *tsbutshu* practices, which situate women as keepers of matrilineal descent and feminine ancestral meaning. Held only by the female line, this living figurine offers significance for the maintenance of feminine power, education and representation within Venda society.

As Dederen points out, the doll provides women with a powerful tool to symbolically weaken the patriarchy of their society (2010). The fertility figurine can be seen to hold a deeply resistant feminine presence, subversive of patriarchal power, specifically as it arises in personal practices and spaces. While this subversive potential may not have been explicitly revealed in public, in the secret and sacred traditions of feminine initiations their use and perception was linked specifically to the sexuality and pride of the women.

In *Apple Girl*, the queen laments her inability to conceive in a public way, but the presence of her own fertility and feminine power is held in the symbols on her body as well as symbols present yet hidden from the view of the audience. Joubert (2010: 51) describes the tableaux world, as well as the figure of the Queen puppet, as filled with symbols of fertility, expressing her yearning desire to bear a child:

As the boudoir of the queen is wheeled into the performance, Crawford sings the queen's lament, with words taken directly from Calvino, punctuated by the puppet raising her arms in varied gestures of supplication, epiphany and despair.

Oh! Oh! Oh!

Oh! Oh! Oh!

Oh! Oh! Oh!

Oh why can't I bear children the same as the apple tree bears apples?

Oh why can't I bear children the same as the apple tree bears apples?

Oh! Oh! Oh!

Yet, Joubert describes how inside the closed drawer of the table on which the queen stands, there are fertility symbols (spiral snakes, cosmic eggs, and a labyrinth with a vulva), which she describes as “attached to the little cupboard like a silent prayer” (Joubert, 2010: 51). The hidden prayers within the shrine express a symbolism of feminine procreativity in a secretive way, which echoes the ways in which fertility figures have been and are used by women in their personal experiences of desire and fertility as described by Dederen above. In my own creative reading of the symbolism in Joubert’s piece, these hidden fertility symbols express the sexual power and creative force of the queen, as she does in fact manage to conceive a daughter, called Apple Girl. My interpretation links the queen in Joubert’s performance to South African fertility doll practices, specifically through the intimate ways that the symbolism of fertility and the fertility figures hold presence (visible and invisible) for individuals. The personal intimacy of the fertility figure, which gathers meaning and power in women’s secret spaces is a potential locus of its resistance as a Feminine Semiotic.

In the ritual performance of *Apple Girl*, Joubert enters multiple feminine imaginative and animist bodies and spaces. The evocations of personal myth in the ritual objects she creates express transformative rites of passage into and through womanhood, sexuality, and personal metamorphosis that the story’s archetypes express. One of the most significant of the ritual tableaux in *Apple Girl* is what Joubert calls *The Altar*, a large constructed wooden box that houses three sculpted figures. The figures combine and revise specifically pre-patriarchal and pre-western fertility and power icons such as the bisexual ancestral Khoi San therianthrope from South African rock art. The second sculpture references the Venus of Willendorf (a fertility icon from prehistoric European art) built out of tortoise bones. The third is based on the Senufo (Ivory Coast) sculpture of *Kono*, the ancestral bird-woman made from pig’s scapulas. These figures are present throughout the performance, overseeing the unfolding events and witnessing them within the multisexual presence of the sacred feminine.

Joubert speaks of the therianthrope, a gender-ambiguous figure derived from San rock paintings found in South Africa, which she says suggests

An ancestral inter-connectedness between humans and animals... This numinous figure is intended to be sexually ambiguous, representing the enviable state of balance in which gender is no longer relevant: the breasts and horns could be either male or female and the cowrie shell suggests a navel or a vagina. (Joubert, 2012: 44)

This sexual ambiguity and bisexuality is seen in many other traditional South African fertility figurines, for example the Sotho *Ngoana Modula* (child of grass) or the Ntwane fertility dolls called *Gimmwane*, where the figure has a phallic shape but is covered in the feminine traditions and symbolism of beadwork. These gender-ambiguous figurines, far from making gender irrelevant, potentially derive from bilineal, pre-patriarchal heritage in which shared power between sexes was expressed through the sexual potency of these figures (2010: 27). Dederen goes so far as to suggest that “the feminized phallic image would have redefined manhood as a mere tool for the realization of female identity”, the ultimate power of woman to hold the mysteries of life and procreation, menstruation and death that is the complex process of feminine fertility and lineage (2010: 36).

These meanings would also have taken their full significance in the actual performance of ritual, extending beyond the figure itself and highlighting the acutely permeable surfaces of separation between self and other. In the liminal states of women’s sacred performance, the figurine is integral to flux, power, protection, embodiment, and spirit of the rite of passage. As Dederen points out, the figurine would also have innovated and changed over the centuries, but always serving as reminder and representation of the womb where “in the sphere of human procreation, female sexual potency rules supreme” (2010: 37).

The triptych altar in *Apple Girl* is situated not only as a centerpiece for reclamation of feminine power, but also operates as limen, a permeable symbolic entranceway between the shifting forces of sexuality, power, spirit and material. Minh-ha declares that the artist’s job is to

bring forward and open the realms of the visible and invisible (1987). It is both the visibility and invisibility of what she terms the inappropriate other that could pose a transformative strategy for representation. Here, “one would have to break with such a system of dualities and show... what constitutes invisibility itself as well as what exceeds mere visibility” (Grzanic, 1998: 3). On Joubert’s performance altar, the therianthrope, the ancestral bird woman, and the Venus inhabit a liminal space, that is they are both *in* the world and *between* worlds, here and elsewhere simultaneously. Minh-ha uses the terms “elsewhere” and “within here”, aligning identity representation with the destabilization of time and space (Grzanic, 1998: 3). The destabilization of time and space by the gender-ambiguous figure of the therianthrope and the interspecies form of the bird woman operate to question, to celebrate, and to corrode the fixedness of the subject in the here and now.

I read the Feminine Semiotics of animism in Joubert’s living sculptures, as expressed in the melding points of form and construct, ritual and performance, myth and metaphor, personal and political in her creative meaning making. It is these multiple layers that converge in the “puppet” as what Joubert calls “performed sculpture” (2010: 27), that render it an inappropriate other in my understanding. This permeable and threshold place of the puppet, in my reading of it, both expresses and confounds construct and being, visually and critically bridging the inside and the outside, seen and unseen, the critical and the embodied.

Conclusion

The Feminine Semiotics of the inappropriate other arises in artistic practice in ways that, as Minh-ha declares, exceed the limits while working within them (Grzanic, 1998). The emergent third space of animist presence at the heart of women’s puppetry works in complex ways, which, as I have explored, to quote Minh-ha, are “simultaneous and always inexhaustive” (Grzanic, 1998). This borderline, in-between space of animism is what Sara Motta describes as the state of potential and possibility that is alive in the feminizing of resistance through creative practice (2014). Motta locates this in the figure of the storyteller. She writes,

The storyteller dwells out of choice in the margins when as a self that is oppressed, she makes a choice at the crossroads of these two states and ethically commits to politicize this in-betweenness... The storyteller thus does not seek aesthetic, epistemological, and cultural separation from, or control over, the popular. The storyteller imbues the embodied experiences of oppressions with epistemic power... She commits to practices that decenter dominant literacies by reclaiming, recovering, and reinventing the knowledges of the body, heart, and land. (Motta, 2014: 12)

The interstitial space of the storyteller/artist that Motta describes exists specifically in her co-creative, communal re-imagining of being and that is deeply imbricated in, rather than separated from, the embodied personal and collective experience of “history, spatiality, cosmology, culture, and social relations” (Motta, 2014: 12). The storyteller co-constructs meaning through collective re-weaving that breaks down the boundaries of her own narrow identifications with self as well as the monolithic, self/other epistemologies of hegemony. In women’s contemporary resistance practices, puppetry proffers an entry point to a co-constructive strategy of creativity that is located in a deeply feminine multigenicity of being.

Animism expresses the syncretic, multidisciplinary and energetic potential of radical cultural and representational practice. Confluences of ritualized liminality, syncretism and experiential slippage through embodiment, exist at the heart of women’s puppetry performance concerned with animism. These expressions are key to the feminized resistance of this inappropriate other of creative practice in South Africa as well as elsewhere in the world. What this ever-evolving art form offers the landscape of radical as well as materialist subaltern feminist enquiry is an artistic strategy of spiritual and sexual resistance to western patriarchal oppression. What I hope this exploration of the feminine semiotics of animism has begun to reveal, is how the intimately feminine creative impulse expressed through puppetry may be linked to the feminization of resistance and emergent processes of being in the threshold spaces of the subaltern.

I am aware, as a South African artist, of the stigmatization and invisibility of women's puppetry, not only in our own country, but in how this perception is echoed in global performance practices (Obraztsov, 1967). This particular stigma has, to a large extent, excluded puppetry by shaming it as women's practice directed at the immature and excluding it from high art discourses. Part of this is due to the occidental assumption that the roots of modern puppetry practice aimed at adults and a critical audience, stem from masculine modernist and postmodern traditions. Focus is primarily afforded to the intersecting patriarchal traditions of European, Mediterranean and Asian intercultural exchanges. There is little or no critical awareness of how these traditions arose historically in colonial and patriarchal imperatives that marginalized the feminine. Much of European puppet-object theorizing has sought critical substantiation, integrating the modus operandi of the puppet within the agency of the object in a specifically modernist discourse. This fearful de-feminizing and de-sexualizing of the energetic and sentient roots of puppetry in critical discourse, has done much to limit critical expression of the subversive, phenomenological heart of the practice and what this means for sexual and spiritual resistance. Yet it is the radical feminine at the heart of puppetry that offers so many of the discursive strategies for resistance that emerge in its contemporary performance applications.

The radical syncretism of the feminine resides in its liminality, at the threshold of form and spirit, sentience and construction, being and desire. The Feminine Semiotics of contemporary animism express sexual and spiritual emergence (as a process of ecstatic becoming, rising up) and emergency (as a call to address the ravages of patriarchal cultural and political domination) through complex representation of the permeability of being. This threshold space of flux and intersection heralds the imminent challenge of the inappropriate third to multiple sites of oppression and containment that operate to denounce the truly resistant practices of feminine creativity. Yet, in the intimate, often personal spaces of dolls, ritual, living sculpture, presence, symbol, slippage and embodiment that form aspects of women's puppetry practices today, we may find expression that provides a feminized strategy for r-evolutionary creative practices.

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Queering Resistance, Queering Research: In Search of a Queer Decolonial Feminist Understanding of Adivasi Indigeneity¹

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Abstract

In this paper, I place both the methodological and epistemological realms of my doctoral research with the Adivasis (indigenous peoples) of Attappady, Kerala under a queer decolonial feminist lens in order to better understand the nature of contemporary Adivasi indigeneity, and indigenous resistance. Given Kerala's unique position within India as a communist state, often acting in the interest of global capitalism by implementing neoliberal policies and steering state-led development plans, its Adivasis are already queer in their relationship to the state as "non-modern others". In order to understand the often contradictory and complex relationship of the Adivasi with the communist-neoliberal state, beyond being the "marginal other", I mobilize a queer decolonial feminist framework, through a process I term queering. I use queering to critically examine and analyze contemporary indigeneity and indigenous resistance in two stages. Firstly, through

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a broad analysis of the coloniality of development and its material effects on Adivasi lands resulting in land struggles. Secondly, through a narrower focus on gender and sexuality to show how queering is also useful in understanding the operation of particular modalities of power. In doing so, I argue that queering reveals the latent structural complexities of Adivasi indigeneity by drawing causal links between systematic processes of land loss and land alienation, material livelihood, and structural changes in various domains, including gender, sexuality, spirituality and health. I also argue that emergent and existing modalities of Adivasi resistance, despite the forms they take, are in fact epistemological and ontological acts of decolonial resistance against the combined coloniality of capitalism, development and modernity on their ancestral lands.

I. Introduction: The Problem of Unqueered Adivasi Materiality

India's particularly complex socio-cultural history, its multiple diversities, and its experience of European colonialisms has had temporally and spatially diverse impacts on its Adivasi (indigenous) populations. Both the British colonial state and the postcolonial Indian state have oscillated between policies of assimilation/integration, and those of isolation with regard to the Adivasis. The current postcolonial Indian state, following its predecessors, has instituted several policies to ensure the "parallel development" of Adivasi populations alongside mainstream society, in an effort to recognize and address their socio-cultural and economic differences. State policy is thus aimed at "mainstreaming", i.e., systematically transforming Adivasis from passive state subjects to full citizens. This process of mainstreaming through development policies has had various impacts on Adivasi lives and livelihoods that are best described as being "colonial". Such policies create and sustain conditions of coloniality through state-led and state-supported development planning, as well as their associated capital relations. In an effort to make these multiple conditions of coloniality visible, I employ decolonial lenses colored by queer and feminist theories in an analytical process I term *queering*. *Queering*, in this paper, thus works to expand current understandings of indigeneity in India by showing how the very understanding of difference upon which Adivasi indigeneity is embedded in a deeply colonial and coloniz-

ing power relation. This in turn leads to continuing contestations over indigenous identity and the related notions of land relations and politics.

Following complex patterns of colonial and postcolonial state management of Adivasis, current state policies have a twofold and contradictory goal of integration and isolation. On the one hand, state policies consist of mechanisms of integration aimed at transforming Adivasis into full citizens of the state (via development policies). On the other, they consist of mechanisms of isolation that maintain their subaltern status (via policies of socio-cultural and ecological preservation). *Queering* state policies by critically analyzing their impacts on the ground through a decolonial feminist perspective reveals that these contradictory goals often collide, resulting in development policies creating a state of dependence rather than empowerment, and conservation policies supporting industrial growth rather than socio-ecological preservation. I use the following example to show how *queering* works to expose latent contradictions and connections that, when visible, complicate and enrich present understandings of Adivasi indigeneity.

An article in a leading national newspaper, “‘Alcoholic’ tag causes hurt to tribal victims”, published on August 3, 2013, states that various politicians “blamed young mothers of Attappady for not ‘eating properly’ and branded them alcoholics, saying their habits led to the death of their children”. Infant deaths attributed to severe neonatal and prenatal malnutrition have been rising in Attappady, and reached a particular high in 2015, when all of the leading national newspapers carried several stories on the issue (“Maternal under-nutrition cause of infant deaths in Attappady: study”, 2013; Philip, 2014; Rajagopal, 2013a, 2013b; Shaji, 2015; Suchitra, 2014). The Kerala government issued a statement identifying “lack of effective implementation of health packages and malnutrition as the major cause of tribal infant deaths in Attappady” on March 10, 2015 (“Malnutrition major cause of tribal infant deaths: Kerala government”, 2015).

The policy solution to these infant deaths thus far has been to increase monetary aid to the effect of 500 crore rupees (roughly US\$75 million), according to one estimate, and state services such as food rations and health clinics to ensure the availability of nutrients and health-care. Despite the increase in these symptomatic solutions little attention

is paid to addressing root causes. Several activists and community leaders reject the narrative of alcoholism among pregnant women, drawing media and state attention instead to the fact that such malnutrition is a direct outcome of the rupture in traditional agricultural practices of the communities.

For instance, on September 22, 2015 in “Death Stalks Attappady Babies”, a local Adivasi NGO employee is quoted as saying:

Long term solutions like restoring the alienated agricultural lands and providing them with basic irrigation still remain on paper. Group farming projects focusing on pulses and millets are yet to be initiated. Short-term measures including providing of nutritious meals are a myth, mainly due to lack of coordination, corruption and sheer indifference of the officials.

This statement identifying land alienation as the root cause of the rise in infant mortality in Attappady evoked much anger and was subsequently dismissed as the ranting of a “Naxalite”, or internal terrorist (Rajagopal, 2013b). At first glance, land alienation and dispossession might not seem to have a direct causal link to rising infant mortality. Yet, an analysis at the ontological level reveals the ways in which the ontologies and epistemologies that ground Adivasi land relations are not only misunderstood, but also how their fractured understanding seriously diminishes the political agency of the Adivasi, at the same time creating critical challenges to their very survival. While a surface-level analysis shows how the mismatch between local needs and state solutions indicates the inadequacy of state development policy and planning, *queering* (whose workings I detail in the later sections of this paper) makes the underlying epistemological and ontological rupturing visible, therefore allowing a more nuanced understanding of Adivasi materiality.

The analytical process of *queering* employs a relational understanding of difference to challenge binary conceptions of identity, therefore exposing the relative nature of marginality, borders and boundaries on the one hand, and fundamentally questioning how power comes to be crystallized in certain spaces, on the other. In doing so, it brings together queer theory’s critique of normativity and binaries, with decolonial

theory's critique of power from the vantage point of modernity and coloniality. *Queering* is thus situated theoretically within a queer decolonial feminist framework that borrows from queer and feminist theories, indigenous studies (including native studies), and decolonial theory (both produced/enacted by resistance movements/indigenous peoples, and theorizations of decoloniality from within the academy). I employ this tool in order to understand, a) the nature of contemporary indigeneity at the nexus of coloniality and modernity, and b) the politics of contemporary indigeneity along multiple lines of difference by undertaking a critical study of the workings of power and resistance. In the following sections, I show how *queering* does this by combining a decolonial perspective that reveals the coloniality of indigeneity, with a queer feminist perspective that makes visible multiple hierarchies of power and their modalities of operation, while fundamentally questioning the categories of difference used by the state (among other placeholders of power). To do so, I draw from feminist ethnographic research conducted between 2010 and 2016 involving over 85 individual and group narrative interviews of Adivasis, rural settlers, government and NGO employees, and land activists.

In the following section, *Theorizing Queering: Crafting A Queer Decolonial Feminist Framework*, I outline the conceptual basis of the QDF framework by delving into queer, decolonial, and feminist theories, as well as their intersections, showing how this framework can be deployed as an analytical tool in its form as *queering*. In the third section, *A Note On Methodology: Queering And Decolonizing Research*, I describe the methodological basis of my research in an effort to show both its role in *queering*, and contextualize the origins and nature of my research and its particularities. In the fourth section, *Queering Contemporary Adivasi Indigenities*, I use *queering* to critically examine and analyze contemporary indigeneity and indigenous resistance in two stages. First, through a broad analysis of the coloniality of development and its material effects on Adivasi lands resulting in land struggles, and secondly, through a narrower focus on gender and sexuality to show how *queering* is also useful in understanding the operation of particular modalities of power. In both, I use examples from my recent and ongoing ethnographic research in Attappady. Finally, in the fifth section, *Some Queer Thoughts that Persist*, I offer a brief overview of my analysis, and end with some lingering questions.

II. Theorizing Queering: Crafting a Queer Decolonial Feminist Framework

Decolonial theory offers a dynamic, evolving and ever expanding political space to decolonize feminist, queer and indigenous studies. Being an active destabilizer of structures and enactments of power, decolonial theory enriches and enlivens queer theory, and this coupling is central to imagining and realizing the theory and politics of this paper. In fact, the organic mobility of ideas between the realms of feminist, queer, indigenous, and native studies enriches each of these fields. In the following section, I elaborate one such dialogue between these three dynamic fields by presenting a queer decolonial feminist (QDF) framework which, by being a modality of resistance itself, offers a strong foundation for studying Adivasi resistance. In what follows, I show how *queering* operates by analyzing both the content and process of this research, examining how contemporary Adivasi indigeneity is produced and exists at the nexus of multiple identities, oppressions and liberations through continuing colonial processes. In so doing, *queering* operates within decolonial spaces of resistance that it helps to create. It takes colonialism as one among many structures that produce varying negative impacts on indigenous bodies and beings, while simultaneously recognizing the agency of the indigenous person as a producer of decolonial knowledges and political agency, rather than a complicit, passive, non-citizen frozen within their forest by popular, colonial, statist discourse. It does so by a) exposing the coloniality inherent in constructing indigenous peoples as marginal beings living within marginal spaces, instead positioning them within the center in active decolonial spaces where the constructed *othering* of the indigenous becomes evident, and b) recognizing and affirming indigenous agency, while simultaneously offering a wider, more inclusive framework that recognizes the multiplicity of indigenous experiences, politics, and ideas.

Queer Decolonial Feminism and Queering

Queer theory emerged from the political work of those striving for diversity in, and inclusion of, non-binary genders and sexualities. It has since worked to expand the otherwise heteronormative bounds of femi-

nist movements and theories by productively complicating and challenging ideas and structures of power, including, but not limited to, those related to gender and sexuality. I draw on three ideas here: of difference, margins/boundaries/borders, and power, in order to show how queer theory can be used to contextualize the concept of indigeneity within broader regimes of power (see Chen, 2012 for a skillfully crafted analysis employing queer theory in a different context).

Indigeneity is usually embedded in a regime of power in which indigenous peoples are defined – “legally/analytically (the ‘other’ definition), practically/strategically (the self-definition), and/or collectively (the global in-group definition)” (Niezen, 2003: 19). While one might already be indigenous by definition, indigeneity is mobilized as a distinct political identity/category by “becoming” indigenous. “Becoming indigenous is always only a *possibility* negotiated within political fields of culture and history” (Cadena and Starn, 2007: 13). Indigeneity is thus often construed as a continuous process whereby “being” indigenous translates into “becoming indigenous” through various practices and performances (Sundberg, 2011) including political participation, resistance, cultural ceremonies, etc. Indigenous politics thus serve as a site of identity-making. But as identity is embedded ontologically in land, indigenous politics are also a site of the decolonization of land, ideas, and identity.

In several state societies, indigenous politics are constructed on the basis of their difference: from the settler in settler colonial contexts, and from state-society in other contexts (of internal colonialism, as in the Indian case). In most of these cases, public and private narratives relating to the indigenous see them as less-than, behind, backward, or primitive, in comparison with the rest of society. Such views become solidified in patronizing state policies that construct the indigene as passive, helpless, hapless, and often as the feminine other. Simon Bignall (2007), in reflecting upon the problematic notion of difference as it is expressed in multicultural, postcolonial societies writes that:

Difference is reified as the compelling or causal force of critical transformation, but simultaneously treated as the problematic absence, lack or disadvantage that must be eventually resolved or dissolved, as soci-

ety reconciles its differences and forges unity and equality (in Hickey-Moody and Palins, 2007: 200).

Queer theory offers a way beyond this paradoxical moment in which a negative conception of difference is seen as both the problem and the solution – where politics become organized around erasing such differences (and result in top-down development policies, for instance). In contrast, queer theory harnesses difference as a positive force to construct an affinity politics that fractures hierarchies of exploitative and oppressive power, which recognize some things as “normal” and others as anomalous/abnormal.

While queerness is about being on the margins, or being *outside the center* (Anzaldúa, 1987), by design it also challenges the making of such margins and boundaries along lines of difference. Gloria Anzaldúa (in Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983) writes that queer groups pose a threat to the operation of power-as-usual by not fitting-in squarely with the world, and that while queer groups are united by their queerness, they are not without internal differences. While marginality may serve as an organizing tool for queer politics, queer theory works to expose marginalization as an intentional, socio-cultural-political process that reflects the inequalities and injustices created by the unevenness of power. By doing so, it fractures spaces where power difference comes to be crystallized (for instance, in race, ethnicity, nationhood, gender and sexuality, Anzaldúa, 1987; Jagose, 1996; Mohanty, 1988) as unchanging self-evident eternal truths, thus making room for resistance and transformation.

Queer theory also shares a political space with feminist theory, drawing heavily from the theory of intersectionality, which examines how gender intersects with different identities to produce different experiences of privilege and oppression (Collins, 2000). While feminist theory questions the operation of power as it relates to the structural operation of gender, it also critically examines places and spaces where power is located and becomes entrenched. It is thus able to scrutinize the structures that govern society at individual and collective levels in an intersectional perspective. A critical feminist theory combining critical race theory with queer theory creates a liberatory politics that envisions marginal spaces as sites of political resistance and transformation. It can

therefore challenge marginality, difference, and the operation of power in the context of indigeneity not only by exposing histories of structural oppression and systematic marginalization, but also by critically examining the body politics of being indigenous (at the individual level, in relation to gender and sexuality for instance; and at the communal level, in relation to indigenous politics and resistance).

Yet, queer theory, even when strengthened by queer of color and feminist critiques, often erases the indigene, politically crippling the indigenous subject by not engaging seriously with coloniality and colonial histories (Smith, 2010: 52–53). To address this problem, it is necessary to critically engage with decolonial theory in conjunction with queer and feminist theories, not only because decolonial theories expose the linkages between coloniality and gender/sexuality (Canfield, 2009; Smith, 2010), but also because their political space can be stretched and complicated by indigeneity. This can be achieved in many ways, for instance, by recognizing “the persistence of Indigenous concepts and epistemologies” (Arvin et al., 2012: 21); engaging with Two-Spiritedness (possessing both male and female spirits, and transcending the male/female binary) to rethink queer studies; and/or questioning whether decolonial struggles and indigenous beings and histories are a part of the intellectual and political consciousness generated by such a perspective (Driskill et al., 2010: 78). Using queer theory thus does not disrupt its intimate politics, but instead bolsters its political potential by analytically challenging, not reinforcing, coloniality in the indigenous context (see Finley in Driskill et al., 2011).

To this end, decolonial theory can be employed to broaden feminist and queer critiques of power by examining how coloniality and modernity operate “as two sides of the same coin” (Grosfoguel, 2007; Quijano, 2000), constructing unequal socio-political-cultural structures that maintain marginality and difference, especially among the indigenous. The project of decolonization, then, is a project of resistance to the conjoined operations of modernity/coloniality and, as such, a negation of the marginality and difference that it coproduces. Concurrently, while decoloniality acts as a resistant, destructive force, it is also a constructive force that rethinks, rewrites and repoliticizes worlds (in plural) by engaging in decolonial meaning-making processes (Mignolo, 2011: 46).

Decolonial theory, therefore, complicates and expands the very definition of history, theory, and truth, in a general sense, by challenging the universalism of occidental history and Eurocentric thinking, and recognizing multiple world-making processes as theory, and by presenting these other theories (ontologies and epistemologies) as equitable, based on a positive, horizontal plane of difference (Alfaisal, 2011; Hokowhitu, 2009; Smith, 2012; Walsh, 2012).

As a perspective that brings together lessons from queer, feminist and decolonial theories, the queer decolonial feminist (QDF) framework allows for a conjoined study of both power and resistance focusing on the most marginal, seeing the place where power is most felt, and therefore containing the greatest possibility of resistance, as the beginning of politics. As radical feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe says, “to study how power operates, we must always start at the bottom and then study up the line of power” (personal conversation, November 2015). Beginning thus, a QDF framework also challenges ways of seeing, knowing and structuring the world normalized by the colonial/modern imperial project, by fundamentally questioning how “western thought” has come to explain and construct a singular world. In other words, through its critiques of epistemic and ontological hierarchies, including those of “asymmetric ignorance” (Chakrabarty, 1992: 2), this framework challenges the very power hierarchies along which the “modern” world has come to be built through colonialism and its associated operatives, hiding within itself the existence of many other worlds. The decolonial project, strengthened by feminist and queer interventions then, is not about border crossing but about shape shifting borders themselves. In such a moment, the indigene becomes visible as an active political agent rather than a passive subject, operating within a shifting, changing space of marginality (or queerness).

Drawing from this framework, I use *queering* as an agentive force to decouple and destabilize normative forms of power and control at the intersection of coloniality and modernity. In other words, I engage in a queer analysis of the project of decolonization.

III. A Note on Methodology: *Queering and Decolonizing Research*

The broad goal of this research is to better understand the complex nature of contemporary indigeneity in India, by examining its structural and ontological relationships to land and resistance. This paper draws from two sets of field research conducted in Attappady, Kerala: pre-dissertation 2010–2015 (about 8 months) and dissertation research in 2016, which is presently ongoing (6 months). I engage in a place-based ethnographic study visiting 82 of 187 hamlets, conducting over 85 individual and group interviews (~ 40 percent female) in Malayalam, Tamil and English with members of the Irular, Mudugar, Kurumbar Adivasi communities, rural settler families, local government officials, forest, education and tribal department officials, Adivasi and non-Adivasi land rights activists, and NGO workers. In order to understand how ontologies of land, and histories and geographies of land, mediate and construct contemporary indigeneity (which includes indigenous politics), I employ the narrative interview method to learn about land ontologies, with interviews typically ranging between 45 minutes to 2.5 hours.

The origins of this study are in scholar-activism: while volunteering with a digital community archiving project in Attappady in 2010, I was told by members of two Adivasi communities that their everyday lives had been greatly disrupted by the sudden and growing appearance of windmills on their supposedly protected lands (as a part of India's green energy initiative). Knowing I was a nascent researcher, they suggested I study the various development projects underway (dam-building, mining), to expose contradictions between their wants and the state's needs (Field notes, 2010). I thus began such a study, which has since evolved into a critical examination of their land struggles and politics in a historical frame.

The study's methodological grounding, however, emerged later on, when faced with having to marry academic rigor with scholar-activism. Drawing from ethnographic methods in anthropology and lessons in feminist research praxis (Harding, 1987) and indigenous studies, I developed the following method in conjunction with the QDF framework, as an exercise in decolonization. By creating space to position respect,

honor and humility centrally within the research process, and by seeing research into the politics of indigeneity as a form of critical resistance in itself, my aim is to decolonize research, following L. T. Smith (2012). In taking lessons from decolonial theorists seriously, this approach sees ontologies and theories shared during interviews as equally valid way of understanding the world (Nirmal, 2016), accepting morality and spirituality as governing principles (Deloria Jr., 1994; Waters, 1995; Cajete, 2000), and seeing ontology as a historically specific political and scientific knowing of the world. In other words, what I present below is a method involving ontological and epistemological understandings drawn from my research and my own social-world.

Stalker (2011) writes of the simultaneous construction of epistemological and ontological narratives of the researcher and the research, whereby the researcher's own world-making merges with those of the research subjects. While I am bound by own epistemological narratives, they are influenced by how I come to know and understand the world ontologically. I reconcile my thus cultivated "partial perspective" (Haraway, 1988) informed by my particular positionality, identity and context, with the theoretical QDF lenses I have chosen to employ, seeing research as:

- a) a relational encounter between two differently queered subjects – that of this brown female researcher within a largely white academy, and that of indigenous peoples and their allies within a predominantly nonindigenous world; b) a practice of solidarity that takes seriously indigenous epistemologies and methods, emphasizing a collective and relational knowledge production within living worlds. By taking into account the power differences between researcher and research subjects, this method emphasizes reflexivity and respect in all research settings (Nirmal, 2016).

In order to recognize and acknowledge how my particular positionality conditions the research process, I make the different worlds I inhabit known, that of North America and South India, and how I am situated in both of these spaces (as a student, teacher, friend, ally, researcher, etc.). I physically, and theoretically, travel back and forth be-

tween what Paola Bacchetta (2010) calls the “global northwest” and, to follow from her, the “global southeast” – in terms of identity, language, and ideas. Here, I see doing QDF research as not imposing ideas and representations from the northwest, but engaging with contextually produced ideas on their own terms, where research itself serves as a space for decolonization (Nirmal, 2016).

I position the entirety of my research within such a space: a *space of queerness*, where the researcher, the researched, and the research itself are queered by difference in their marginalities, oppressions, and liberations, and united by the common goal of decolonizing understandings and experiences of indigeneity. Within this *space of queerness* it becomes possible to question the ways in which marginality comes to be constructed, and recognize the agency of each entity in relation to the other. The *space of queerness*, in my analysis, accommodates multiple marginal positions, serving as an inclusive, shifting space of borderlands, and thus offers a more complex, less rigid understanding of contemporary indigeneity and indigenous resistance in Attappady. As a relational, decolonial zone, it allows the centering of previously marginal beings and ideas by recognizing both the shifting nature of marginality whereby the marginal is often within, and sometimes alongside the center, and the operation of marginality as a modality of resistance.

Within this space, I first situate myself as a morally and politically engaged, open, thinking subject. Hence, I use open signifiers instead of fixed categories (see Sundberg, 2011) exploring what “indigenous”, “Adivasi”, and “research”, etc. mean in the context of this study (that is, I *queer* what each of these mean, contextually). In doing so, I work at being an active observer, rather than a passive researcher engaging with the communities in question on their own terms. That is, I recognize my “partial perspective” as one that is cultivated both consciously and subconsciously within my own socio-political context as a young female member of the Indian middle-class, evident both in my choice of questions and interpretations of answers. In order to be in solidarity with the Adivasis who participate in this research, I try to step in and out of my own perspectival limits by situating my positionality and identity in relation to theirs, and in moments of misunderstanding, asking how I should understand things differently. Finally, I use methods that are

amenable to these particular research conditions – I choose the narrative interview method for engaging in open conversations about indigeneity and indigenous resistance not limited to previously set questions, but by beginning with their particular life and land histories. I also set time aside for their questions about my ontologies, epistemologies, and life history. A recurring question I have been asked, for example, is whether, and what, I know of indigenous peoples in North America. This kind of place-based ethnographic research design allows me to learn from the research process, creating a feedback loop in conversation with research participants to enhance research content, outcomes, and most meaningfully, to learn how my research can be useful to them, as reciprocity is central to queer decolonial feminist research (for instance, by offering research and translation support services).

I also intentionally undertake a form of ethnographic refusal as a declaration of solidarity, and as a way of decolonizing the research process. Sherry Ortner (1995) argues that research into resistance must be ethnographically thick, showcasing the internal messiness of resistance groups in order to produce the most rigorous research. Yet, indigenous activists and scholars (e.g. Simpson, 2007) turn the model on its head, arguing instead for refusal to share certain information with the academy, in order to protect the interests of the research participants, as an engagement in solidarity politics. In direct contradiction to the rational-positivist quest for truth that the western academy is historically built upon, ethnographic refusal queers research by enabling such decolonial scholar-activism.

In fact, I see research *as* resistance (Brown and Strega, 2005), a queer process that destabilizes, rethinks, and questions normative operations of power. In doing so, it allows me to actively queer my relationship to research, situating myself in a subject-position alongside other research subjects as an active agent/observer, while *queering* indigeneity and indigenous resistance as not only already queer, but as already resistant.

In an attempt to bridge theory and practice, I engage the queer decolonial politics of my feminist research with the research process in the next section by examining my relationship with the *space of queerness* on the one hand, the queering of the Adivasi in relation to the state, and indigenous politics on the other, and the possibility of decolonial

feminist praxis that emerges at their meeting. By looking into the political conditions in Kerala that allow the indigenous person to be constructed as queer, I ask, what is the space of the indigenous person in contemporary politics? How can we better understand the complexity of the indigenous condition by positing it to be queer? And finally, I ask, what conditions of possibility are created by a queer decolonial feminist theory for envisioning a radical indigenous politics that goes beyond positioning the indigenous person as *marginal other*?

IV. *Queering* Contemporary Adivasi Indigenities

In *queering* indigeneity and indigenous resistance, within the queer decolonial feminist framework, I undertake an analytical and political coupling of the two, and a related coupling of indigenous epistemologies and ontologies as they are produced and maintained through the performance and experience of indigeneity and indigenous resistance. In what follows, I use a rhizomatic approach to show the continuities between the analytically differentiated indigeneity and indigenous resistance as lying materially and symbolically within land. While the following sections are presented as distinct entities, they are best read together as fluid outcomes of *queering*, revealing multiple spiraling layers of different aspects of contemporary indigeneity.

1. *Queering* Indigeneity: Performing Indigenous Identity as Decolonial Resistance

To speak of Indigeneity is to speak of colonialism and anthropology, as these are means through which Indigenous people have been known and sometimes are still known (Simpson, 2007: 67).

For the indigenous in India, the term “indigeneity” is laden with a peculiar problem: their historicity as the oldest occupants of the land predating all other groups is contested for its temporal accuracy. While in settler states the moment of encounter, i.e. colonization, demarcates clearly the antecedence of the colonized as an “indigenous” population as opposed to the settling outsiders, the Indian subcontinent’s long and complex civilizational history obfuscates any such binary. As Alpa Shah (2007: 1807) writes, the Indian state maintains that there are no indigenous people

in the country owing to its long and complex history of migration and settlement. Within such a politics of erasure, *queering* indigeneity does the difficult task of making Adivasi presence as indigenous peoples visible, while illustrating how indigeneity, owing to its material and political ties to land, comes to be synonymous with indigenous resistance.

The term “Adivasi” is used as a socio-political signifier of indigeneity, indicating both the long historical presence of the indigenous in India, and the political mobilization of a previously marginalized people against their historical oppression and exploitation. The origin of the term is usually attributed to a series of resistances against British colonial occupation of Adivasi territory in Chotanagpur in central India in the 1930s, where it was used to counter the imperialists’ claims to indigenous lands (see Shah, 2007 for a detailed look at its origins). While the legal term within political parlance continues to be “tribe” and “tribal” following colonial practices of social stratification, people have since used “Adivasi” to self-identify as political subjects with particular claims to land. As Baviskar (2007) writes, Adivasi is now a unique entity “animated by complex social practices that have accrued around it”, with the capacity to demand a regime of rights that recognize the history of dispossession and exploitation suffered by Adivasi groups. In harnessing this capacity during resistance events and in the judicial system, indigenous rights activists often frame their demands as essential to indigenous identity, and as fundamentally different from the rest of society. Behind this regime of representation lies a form of strategic essentialism necessitated by real material needs, many of which are grounded in ontologies that are obscured by being different (or queer) and are therefore unrecognizable.

A critical analysis of the political condition of Adivasis under the British reveals a history of scientific racism that later translated into a more nuanced ethnic racism evident in colonial anthropology and the state policies it informed (Bhukya, 2008; Pati, 2010). Although these conditions prevail today, the parametrics of settler colonialism are considered inapplicable in the Indian context because of the physical departure of the British government in 1947. An explanation of the continuing conditions of coloniality lie in the internal colonialism of the Indian state evident in existing colonial ideas, institutions and policies on the one hand (for instance, the creation of the Forest Department through

the Forest Act that acts as a police force protecting forests as state territory and not Adivasi homelands) and the continuity of Adivasi resistance in response to such coloniality on the other.

Queering complicates the understanding of such resistance by revealing the continued antithetical presence of the Adivasi despite the combined power of colonialism, modernity, capitalism and development (all enacting various colonialities), to be a *form of resistance*. In the settler colonial context, the triumph of the colonial project (establishing and maintaining the sovereignty of the settler state) is marked by the material and cultural erasure of the indigene (Smith, 2010; Wolfe, 2006). Here, the continued presence of the indigenous person, and their knowledges and ideas, are antithetical to colonialism and coloniality, and therefore an enactment of decolonization and decoloniality. Likewise, in the context of internal colonialism, the continued existence of Adivasis as active indigenes, rather than passive state-subjects, embodying ontologies and epistemologies derived from ancestral relations to land, is an enactment of decolonization. Hereby, presence as resistance becomes decolonial praxis, where indigenous lands as sites of resistance become spaces to be decolonized, and indigenous epistemologies as decolonial knowledges open spaces to dismantle and destabilize modernist logics. Such a definition expands the idea of resistance to include embodied resistances, such that the non-engagement of some Adivasis in land struggles count as decolonial resistance, whereby simply by living and practicing their indigeneity, they enact decolonization. Here, resistance gains momentum in a decolonial politics derived from a certain ontological relationship to land that forms the basis of Adivasi identity. Significantly, decolonization, as a theoretical-political exercise, cannot be decoupled from resistance, as any theory of decolonization and decoloniality is also a theory of resistance.

While others have outlined the complexity of the indigenous condition in India (see for instance, Baviskar, 2005; Bhukya, 2008; Guha, 2012; Munshi, 2007, 2012; Khan, 2016; Shah, 2007) my goal is to illustrate its characteristics at a microcosmic level through ethnographic analysis in Kerala. Given Kerala's unique position within India as a communist state, though often acting in the interest of global capitalism by implementing neoliberal policies and steering state-led development plans, its Adivasis are also already queer in their relationship to the state as "non-modern

others". In order to understand the often contradictory and complex relationship of the indigene with this communist-neoliberal state, I *queer* indigeneity to reveal the emergent and existing modalities of resistance evident in the Adivasis' struggles against the colonialism of capitalism, development, and modernity in defense of their ancestral lands. Significantly, I propose that through such a QDF lens the Adivasis' resistances emerge primarily as epistemological and ontological enactments of decolonization.

1 (a) *Queering* Indigeneity Reveals that Ontological Differences Sustain Coloniality

In Kerala, Adivasis perform, enact, practice, negotiate, and strategically politicize their indigenous identity as decolonial acts of resistance, especially in their land struggles (I delve into this in a later section). While doing so, they operate within a *space of queerness*, firstly, as intentionally marginalized queer state-subjects in their relegated position as non-citizens living in federally controlled and managed forest areas subject to the rules of the state-society. Simultaneously, state policy is purportedly aimed at transforming Adivasis into full citizens by recognizing and subsequently correcting their marginal status through development plans. However, that this marginality is indeed constructed and maintained by the state becomes particularly evident in moments of deep ontological contradiction. For example:

The Kerala government has several progressive laws and policies that recognize Adivasis' inalienable rights to their ancestral lands, rights that are enshrined in the fifth and sixth schedules of the Indian constitution, enabling them to live on their lands, in their ways. While implementing these laws, the state also administers development policies aimed at creating a common living standard across the state. A housing development project was proposed for a group of deep forest-dwelling Adivasis, to construct concrete houses either in their own (protected) lands, or if they choose to move out of the forest, in surrounding non-Adivasi areas identified by the state, as a way to bridge the aforementioned policy goals. However, in practice, while many in and outside the community critique this project for the high transportation costs,

and hard human labor involved in moving building materials to such remote areas with little or no road access, some point to the lack of ecological meaning of these houses when compared to their vernacular bamboo and mud architecture. Several community members say they would rather have better roads and transportation so that they can decide for themselves what kind of houses they would like to live in, have better access to healthcare (given traditional systems have been structurally depleted by various modern interventions), and an easier commute to sites of work and learning. (Field notes, 2016)

As this example reveals, Adivasi politics are not merely subject to the internal colonialism of the state at the policy level, but also to the operation of coloniality at an everyday level. The state exerts both direct (and material) and indirect (and ideological, structural) power over the Adivasis (at both individual and collective bodily and structural levels), respectively through the physical enforcement of laws governing boundaries and norms by police officers and forest officials, and through official policies, mandates, laws and practices of the state in its many forms (through federal laws governing land acquisition, forest conservation and management; policies of land use mediated by the forest department and the revenue department; and practices enforced by state-run and state-supported institutions, including NGOs). And such power is felt by Adivasis who operate both within and outside state spaces. *Queering* this example reveals that state policies create and maintain conditions of marginality and coloniality by failing to recognize the deep ontological divide between the forest department, which maintains that roads are ecologically unsuitable and unadvisable, the tribal department that sees the Adivasis as impudent children unwilling to leave archaic spaces, and Adivasis, who see themselves and their needs as an integral part of the ecological sustainability of the region.

1 (b) *Queering* Indigeneity Reveals that Adivasi Self-Recognition Queers Power Relations

Queering indigeneity reveals its complex of meanings ranging between individual self-identification as socio-cultural-ecological expression, and strategic political identification as an agentive political category, particu-

larly in the context of land rights. These meanings are often in direct response to the coloniality of externally imposed identities that range between the ecologically superior “noble savage” and the ignorant, non-modern, uncivilized primitive (visible for instance in human-interest media reports on poverty/development/conservation).

Historically, this self-recognition becomes politically necessary because of the linear vision of the state and other dominant systems of power that cast Adivasis as culturally distinct “tribals” with different socio-political systems that are, both, inside and outside, state-society, and who through processes of mainstreaming must be transformed into full citizens of the state. Within queer visions of the Adivasis themselves, they are cast as indigenous peoples, identifying with others across the world with legitimate (even if not “legal” within the domains of the state) claims to ancestral territories and socio-ecological political systems. This self-identification and political positioning is in itself a resistance to the colonial category of “tribe” that continues to narrowly define their complex, nuanced and diverse existence. I explain this further by reflecting on recurring narrative used by several Adivasis that is best understood when situated within a *space of queerness*.

When the Adivasis speak of themselves as Adivasis, as *the* indigenous peoples, and others as “those of the country”, “country-man/boy”, “country-woman/girl”, “country-person/child” and as “generalites”, their linguistic choice is based on a politics of difference, that when *queered*, reveals the “country” to be the periphery (even if bigger and more powerful) surrounding their indigenous center (Field notes, 2016).

At first glance it seems politically useful, especially in a supposed “welfare state” (like Kerala) to adopt and support a politics of marginality that discursively and materially positions Adivasis as those on the “outside”, needing and deserving government support and welfare. However, the resulting politics of control (through state mandates and policies), and the more insidious politics of pitting agency against identity, wherein agency is only available to those willing to relinquish, or at least successfully disguise, their indigenous identity, leaves Adivasi indigeneity in a political vacuum devoid of justice. *Queering* refuses to accept

the normativity of such a subject position that builds figurative walls around what is intentionally placed at the center, and the plebeian world, which in this case are Adivasi worlds. By challenging such an operation of power at its core by revealing its colonial bases, *queering* also makes it possible to reimagine a politics of decolonial resistance that takes the inversion of the margin and the center as its starting point.

Thus, while *queering* Adivasi indigeneity in Kerala reveals its colonial relation with the state, it also reveals the relational construction of marginality undertaken by both groups. Owing to the fact that power is indeed vested in the state, this relationship is often perceived to be fixed and unchanging, when in fact it is performed differently in different contexts. While the state's performance is accepted as part of its pluralist governance strategy, performed Adivasi indigeneity is automatically cast as inauthentic and essentialist, or authentic and essentialist (depending on whether one uses a positive or negative conception of difference). However, the tendency to see performed Adivasi indigeneity as inauthentic is not a problem that is particular to India alone. It is therefore a significant political move in the Indian context to understand Adivasi indigeneity as fluid and politically strategic, because such an understanding not only posits the indigene to be an active political agent, but also creates possibilities for mobilizing and negotiating land relations and rights. *Queering* contests the state's (and often, the state-society's) presupposition of historical linearity that demands a fixed unilateral representation of Adivasis as primitive, dependent, and "non-modern" (the "authentic", recognizable identity), in order to accept/allow their engagement in land politics and resistances for land. *Queering* reveals instead that the space of indigeneity (which is also *the space of queerness*) includes material land, as indigeneity is always-already in relation to land.

1 (c) *Queering* Indigeneity Reveals that Land is the Material Space of Queerness

The politics of land is indeed constructed with the indigenes on the periphery, in their own semantics and everyday practices and lives. While they operate at the margins, and sometimes within the center (e.g. as government and NGO employees), much of their ontological and epistemological imaginaries (and consequently narratives) are built with them

very squarely in the center. *Queering*, as that which troubles the normative, is thus immensely useful in understanding these subterranean operations of power, especially the shifting, growing, morphing and moving of power across different positions.

I *queer* Adivasi resistance in India to further demonstrate the complexities of indigeneity and indigenous politics in Kerala, and also to show its inextricable ties with land and land politics. To reiterate, it is not my intention to separate indigeneity and indigenous resistance as distinct and unrelated categories, but rather to analytically *queer* the two separately in order to further highlight the theoretical and practical continuities between them.

In Attappady, several Adivasi land rights activists and community members (not all) identify an ontological relationship to land that is represented in particular historical narratives pertaining to their territories.

If the land isn't there, we are not there. Without us, there is no land. Without land we cannot live, we cannot cultivate crops. Nowadays all the talk about land rights is because of this... all the problems we face are because of [problems with, or not having] land. We Adivasis have an umbilical connection with the land, that is who we are. That is our connection. It is because of not having land that we have all these problems, our connection is broken. (Group interview on February 7, 2016; translated from Tamil and Malayalam by the author)

The struggle for land rights that has been underway in the region is underwritten by such an ontological relationship to land, as indigenous scholars in the Americas have also asserted, "land occupies as an ontological framework for understanding relationships" (Coulthard, 2010: 79). In fact, Adivasis ontological claims extend to referring themselves as the land, and to the land as the living world (Field notes, 2014, 2016).

In their resistances to numerous state-led and private sector development initiatives, as well as national and international conservation programs, the Adivasis of Attappady use various legal mechanisms to claim their ancestral rights to their previously common lands. In doing so, they often perform their indigeneity through an identity politics that attempts to speak the state's language in order to gain both recognition

and acceptance (see Coulthard, 2014). In moments when their actions are not channeled through these legal vestiges of power, they are either dismissed as petulant or misinformed (in narratives that cast them as childlike, without political awareness or agency), or in stark contrast, more nefariously, as “Naxalites” or “Maoists”, and therefore both bodily targeted and categorically dismissed as internal terrorists without justifiable rights to resistance. *Queering* resistance at such complex junctures reveals several underlying ontological problems, including the valuation of land, and the meaning of land as forest.

While there are clear differences in the ways land is valued by the state and market on the one hand, and Adivasis on the other, it is ontological linkages that are befogged by linear valuations seeing land as place devoid of relations. When asked what image comes to their mind when thinking of the word “land”, most Adivasis I interviewed said they saw (living worlds containing) mountains, rivers, their homes/homestead, cultivable areas, animals, trees, birds, their ancestors and built structures (Field notes, 2014–2016). One striking response was “everything and everybody in the family” (Interview notes, 2016). I draw on a series of conversations in March 2016 to illustrate how the Adivasis frame the ontological significance of their land as lying within a particular mountain:

The mountain peak that can be seen from the Attappady valley, from all of its hills except one, is God say the Adivasis. While one of the Adivasi groups continue their tradition of undertaking a ritualistic pilgrimage every year to the peak to celebrate and worship the God, others worship at the fairly new temple that has been built in the God’s honor. Those who undertake the annual pilgrimage say what is atop the peak is a stone, a part of the mountain that is an embodied God, and that the space itself is a shape shifting space that grows to accommodate all those who make the climb. Because of the influence of Hindu settlers the temple is known to all those who visit as a local Siva temple, as the mountain God is now seen as a form of Lord Siva. While both locals and visitors from nearby towns visit the temple, many fail to pay attention to its particular location. When standing outside the temple, what is visible from its gateway is the peak, the abode of the mountain god, the most sacred of spaces. The temple stands in unspoken, symbolic

tribute to the real place of the Adivasi God, even as it houses their hybrid Hindu structural form.

Queering Adivasi land relations in this instance goes to show that it is not land as abstracted space that has meaning and value, but particular lands that have ontological, not only spiritual and material, value. It also shows that Adivasi resistances for land are not simply about cultivable spaces (even though they are that), but also about the materiality derived from particular ontological relations to specific lands. In *queering* indigenous resistance, this not only reveals historical continuities between expressions of indigeneity (as resistance), but also the continuing ontological violence rendered by multiple colonialities that by imposing an ontological and epistemological hierarchy fail to see real and material ties to lands and living worlds, resulting in what Blaser (2009, 2010, 2014) calls “ontological politics”.

2. *Queering* Gender and Sexuality

In this section, I employ *queering* as an active tool to destabilize nodes, structures, spaces and processes in which power becomes ossified with regard to gender and sexuality in an attempt to unearth some alternative, decolonial understandings of the varied and often nefarious ways in which normative understandings serve to undercut the complexities of contemporary Adivasi indigeneity.

The notion that gender difference is often externally imposed through varied experiences of power, ranging from the colonizer’s advocated cultural superiority to the invading populace’s construction of its socio-cultural-ecological practices as the norm (for example by attributing gender to gods, co-opting pagan worship practices), and the state’s legal system, has been debated and explored by various scholars. For instance, the construction of heteropatriarchy is seen as a key feature of (settler) colonialism (Smith, 2010; Arvin et al., 2013) where the conjoining of colonialism with patriarchy enforces the violent removal of the indigenous person from the land and imposes several binaries, including those of male/female, body/mind, lived knowledge/learned knowledge, and so on (Simpson, 2012). Such hierarchical and binary constructions are also evident in Attappady, a key example of which is the transforma-

tion of the mountain God into a male Hindu God, as described above. While the coloniality evident in these lingering institutions and practices is indeed significant, noting their decisive impacts on Adivasis gender norms is only the first layer of the onion that *queering* aims to peel.

2 (a) *Queering* Adivasi History Reveals Gender-Land-Ecology Relations

British colonialism, the usual referent of India's colonial history, did much by way of importing British patriarchy to the Indian colony. However, the Adivasis' relative historical isolation allowed them a degree of protection from experiencing the full weight of colonialism in the early years. While the British visited Adivasi lands in Attappady in the early twentieth century to conduct land surveys and were guided in their mapping efforts by some Adivasi groups living in the valley areas, other groups of Adivasis living in higher, more rugged mountain areas insist that their lands were not surveyed till the late 1930's (Field notes, 2011–2016). By most historical accounts, British colonialism is considered *the* colonial experience that shaped India's political, cultural, social and ecological history. In the case of Adivasis, this is especially true as it was British colonialism that was materially and politically felt through organized and systematic visits and territorial sanctions that left their imprint on Adivasi lands and bodies.

In Attappady, the invasion of Adivasi territory in the early twentieth century by rural settlers (an early form of internal colonialism) and the subsequent occupation of Adivasi commons through negotiation, trickery, and force, led to major socio-ecological and cultural transformations. In what follows, I examine the intersectional effects of such transformations illustrating how the colonization of Adivasi lands and their subsequent colonial experiences work at a deeper level to disrupt and radically change gender, land, and ecological relations, often with deleterious effects.

Previously we didn't have any distinctions between who was male, and who was female. We don't see difference like that. Now, we do. Whether adults or children, we never used to care [about gender]. In fact, we

didn't wear any clothes till we were about fifteen². We all work equally, it is not like you country folk [with your gender differences]. During Kambalakkadu the women and men dance together and celebrate for many days. We used to do this every year and it was a big deal... it was a massive celebration but now we don't do it anymore. The circumstances have changed. The forest has taken over the lands that we used to cultivate, and we need particular spaces to do these ceremonies that we don't have access to. That is a major struggle for us now, not having access to our usual lands – because we have different uses for our lands that the forest department doesn't recognize. (February 10, 2016; Translated from Tamil and Malayalam by the author)

This extended excerpt illustrates a number of things, showing both the scope of *queering* and the depth of complexities hidden beneath declarations of change that are often regarded as “normal” and simplistic indicators of the changing times. What is obvious at first glance, is that Adivasi gender relations are significantly transformed by restrictions in access to the lands that were previously available for different uses. Kambalakkadu is a harvest ceremony that brings together men and women in a cultural-ecological celebration intended to foster a spirit of thanks and celebration in particular cultivable areas. Now with all forestlands being under federal control, and with the forest department, through a colonial history of scientific forestry and forest management policies (Sivaramakrishnan, 1995) designating areas for habitation and cultivation by its own logics, Kambalakkadu is no longer performed. In fact, the particularity of cultivable areas and the historical use of shifting cultivation were and continue to be entirely disregarded in forest service allocation processes.

What also emerges while *queering* is the impact of changing gender norms on Adivasi work culture as realms of shared work have now shifted across gender lines, particularly because of the restrictions in access to cultivable lands. While in some cases it has transformed both women and men into unwilling welfare subjects who no longer engage in agricultural work outside the home, in others, changes in the nature of

² This particular interviewee was the oldest in the group (he estimated his age to be around sixty).

agricultural practices shifting from subsistence food crop cultivation to state-supported cash-crop cultivation (as the latter is no longer economically viable) has been accompanied by a skewing of the division of labor. In fact, *queering* further reveals that subsistence farming included commodity exchanges in the early postcolonial years with Adivasis selling part of their harvest and gathered food (honey and tubers, for example) in order to purchase small items such as rock salt, small onions and black pepper (Field notes, June 2014, February 2016).

Furthermore, *queering* understandings of gender within this context reveals how experiences of indigeneity are differentiated along lines of gender, age, class, and so on. It also reveals the transverse material links between indigeneity and indigenous resistance deriving from land that serves as a source of commonality, rather than difference. Just as *queering* the death of infants in Attappady reveals causal ties between malnutrition of infants and pregnant mothers, and land loss, alienation from land, and the subsequent changes in socio-political-ecological practices, *queering* indigeneity along different lines reveals its multiple ties with land.

Queering reveals the milieu of land uses and land relations that sustain Adivasi communities, mediating, negotiating, and organizing their use of particular lands for particular purposes. For instance, “kaaTu” refers to land for agriculture, while “maNu” refers to all land, territory and living world, “veeTu” refers to home, and “solai” refers to the forest (Interview notes, 2016). Subsuming all of these under the category of “land” and then identifying land use practices and modalities of access produces much material and discursive violence in its wake. The land rights derived from such a narrow and potentially harmful vision are then mediated and negotiated by the Forest Department in the region, as the agent of the state responsible for meting out use and access rights. *Queering* land rights in this context reveals that not all rights recognized by the community in its practices can be acknowledged by the state so long as it maintains its singular vision.

Further, *queering* also reveals how these multiple land uses and practices intersect with gender and health in nefarious ways. For instance, in an effort to address the growing problem of neo/prenatal and child malnutrition, the state, in collaboration with community members, local and International NGOs, conducted extensive research into the prob-

lem's origins. It concluded that the origins lay in drastic changes in lifestyle and food consumption patterns, and hence introduced a number of progressive measures to ensure an increase in nutrition, healthcare access, and overall wellbeing. One such intervention was the creation of locally operated, female-run "community kitchens" aimed at feeding two undernourished populations – the very young and the very old. Ironically, the kitchens provided rice and lentils, both of which are not a part of the traditional diet, whose loss led to malnutrition in the first place. When *queered*, the links between colonial erasure of food systems, and the need to revive and rejuvenate pre-colonial land use practices, becomes evident. Similarly, another intervention involved providing Ragi, protein-rich millet that was once a staple in their diet. This project has been relatively more successful owing to its context-specificity, dictated in large part by the fact that it was designed in consultation with the local Nodal Health Officer with extensive local contextual knowledge. Yet, instead of making local cultivation of Ragi possible and prosperous (or putting long term policies in place alongside short term planning), the government rations packaged Ragi produced elsewhere in the state to the communities. Hence, once again, the ontological and material ties between land, as a source of ecological continuity and livelihood, and life itself, were not visible to the unqueered eye of the state.

2 (b) *Queering* Sexuality at a Glance

Queering Adivasi sexuality reveals another set of incongruences and epistemological ruptures in the linear vision of the state.

During the course of a conversation with a group of Adivasi activists in 2014, I was told that a group of Adivasis in the region had been following a marriage practice where two young post-pubescent individuals choose one another, and build a hut together that they then occupy as husband and wife. However, the imposition of a state law criminalized any sexual encounter under the age of 18 as rape and sexual abuse of a minor, leading to accusations of sexual deviance in the less serious cases, and to accusations of rape in more serious ones. This served to disproportionately affect young men, casting them as rapists, while casting some young women as sexual deviants, and others, in the rare

case, as rape victims. Yet, in strong contrast, a young Adivasi woman who was raped by a rural settler was not recognized as a rape victim because of the presumed sexual deviance of Adivasi culture where all sexual encounter is assumed to be consensual because of the purported difference in Adivasi sexual practices. (Field notes, June 2014)

Hereby, operating within a *space of queerness*, Adivasis become sexual subjects without any judicial recourse simply because of their difference (or, queerness). Thus *queering* narratives about gender and sexuality, or any other category under study, reveals not only what underlies the thing itself, but also reveals cross connections and linkages unbounded by the category, making it analytically open and malleable. *Queering* in this context also critically points to the links to land, identifying land as the source of all decolonial Adivasi politics. Hence, *queering* is not just about decolonizing relations to land, but also about the decolonization of everything in relation, as these open categories are inextricably linked.

V. Some Queer Thoughts that Persist

It is not easy to piece together the many ill-fitting pieces of the jigsaw that makes up the tale of the Adivasis in India, and particularly, in Kerala. *Queering* the Adivasi story offers one way to connect seemingly disparate nodal points in the story by bringing colonialism to the forefront, identifying how they are situated within the condition of coloniality, and highlighting their resulting decolonial resistance. Thus far, I have drawn a few lines of analysis to show how *queering* challenges the supposed marginality of the Adivasi, making their agentive power visible. By foregrounding a decolonial perspective, *queering* shows how the internal colonialism of the Indian state categorically marginalizes the Adivasi both materially and discursively, as a condition of its operation. It is through the modality of operation of power under coloniality that Adivasi marginality is thus produced. *Queering* indigeneity reveals how such constructed marginality can be challenged, negotiated and transformed through resistance, making the need for decolonization imminently visible.

Queering therefore offers a moment of possibility to challenge and change conventional discourses around indigeneity in Attappady, in particular, and in India in general. For instance, it shows how marginality

is systematically constructed by various structures of oppressive power and finds no place in the Adivasis' own self-imaginaries. Yet Adivasis also sometimes engage in a strategic, political performance of marginality to claim their indigeneity in the eyes of the state (for various policy benefits, and in their resistances). Seen within a performative frame, an active dynamic thus emerges between acts of centering and decentering Adivasi identity. *Queering* Adivasi indigeneity in this context challenges the binary between “modern” ontology, and Adivasi land ontologies, enriching possibilities for Adivasi futurities to be a part of a “modern” Indian imaginary from which it is otherwise excluded based on essentialized understandings of difference. By casting Adivasis as intentionally *queer* in relation to the state and non-indigenous state-society, it is possible to see the space of indigeneity as a *space of queerness* with power vested within its confines.

Queering allows the analytical, and therefore discursive coupling of indigeneity and indigenous resistance within the *space of queerness* that includes the material land conceptualized as living worlds of interconnected beings. By revealing the deep ontological linkages between land, indigeneity, and resistance, and showing how a politics of land is not confined to material struggles for land alone, it offers a range of liberatory possibilities. Operating within a queer decolonial feminist framework, it produces a number of such conditions of possibility for envisioning a radical indigenous politics that goes beyond positioning the indigenous person as *marginal other*. For one, it stands to impact the ways in which Adivasi relations to land are understood in state policymaking and practice. At its simplest, it advocates for a peeling exercise, employing *queering* to unearth the complexities that lie beneath the surface.

Queering also expands present conceptions of indigenous resistance showing how ontological differences in conceptions of land mediate and characterize resistance. By bringing a queer decolonial feminist lens to the study of resistance, it also expands the understanding of resistance in general, outside of the classical social movement frame (see McAdam et al., 1996). While there are indeed Adivasi social movements engaged in resistance in Kerala, like the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (see Steur, 2011), *queering* resistance in Attappady reveals diverse resistance politics that cannot be contained within the umbrella of a social movement. For

instance, by situating the meaning and nature of resistance within a decolonial frame, *queering* reveals the active, continuing presence of the Adivasi within the modern nation state to be an act of decolonial resistance. Additionally, *queering* complicates resistance by seeing acts of refusal, non-engagement, and denial and at their core, ontological difference as decolonial engagements and acts of resistance. Even when Adivasis do not engage in protests and movement actions, they continue to live in living worlds of their own ontological, epistemological, and material making. This continued presence and prevalence of Adivasi land ontologies, and the living worlds that their ontologies enact and sustain despite years of colonial intervention, indicates presence to be a modality of resistance in general, and a form of embodied resistance in particular.

Such interpretations of resistance do not fit into notions of “everyday resistance” (Scott, 2008) either. While everyday resistances capture the elusive, intangible characteristics of covert resistance, they do not account for active presence as resistance. Presence as resistance indicates the ontological foundations of resistance, showing active presence within ontologically distinct (even if not entirely dissimilar) living worlds (as spaces of resistance) to be a form of decolonial resistance. As such, embodied resistances evident in Attappady are not only dynamic responses and reactions, but also a priori forms of ontologically distinct existence effecting active disengagement. Such resistance, while insufficiently explained by studies of individual/collective, covert/overt forms of resistance, can be better understood as a conjoined component of decoloniality where that which is decolonial, is already in resistance. That is, by illustrating the complex and multiple ties between various internal colonial forces acting on the Adivasis and their impacts on Adivasi land ontologies and living worlds, *queering* reveals indigenous resistance to be fundamentally decolonial in nature. Hereby, to engage in decolonization is to engage in resistance and vice-versa.

Further, *queering’s* usefulness as an analytical tool can be harnessed in several other ways that have not been within the scope of this paper. Some central questions that remain have to do with a second layer of analysis that *queering* makes possible – for instance, by revealing the deep ontological linkages between land, food, and health, it can enrich the field of environmental justice by creating pathways to decolonize cur-

rent debates in the field. In doing so, it can point to food sovereignty as an end goal of decolonial environmental justice in the Adivasi context.

In another sense, *queering* as a tool of decolonization can impact the recognition and production of decolonial knowledges and theories by actively *queering* Adivasi land ontologies as theory. Relatedly, by pointing to the ontological basis of resistance, *queering* also significantly casts the alternative understandings produced, mobilized, and effected by such resistances as theory. Taiaiake Alfred (1999, 2005) has argued that indigenous resistance must imagine alternative futures through political strategies divorced from the state sovereignty model. He argues for what Simpson (2012) calls “looking back” to look forward, drawing from indigenous knowledges, ontologies, and practices “the autonomy of individual conscience, non-coercive authority, and the deep interconnection between human beings and other elements of the creation”. The production of such decolonial frameworks through resistance can also be seen as an iterative practice of *queering* whereby future moments of possibility are created and imagined from points of similarity and connection, rather than difference. Through its various enactments of liberatory practices and politics, *queering* ultimately stands to markedly serve justice to peoples for whom it has too long been delayed, and denied. As such, it stands to contribute much to decolonization in this part of the global South’s fourth world. As Leroy Little Bear (2005: xii) writes,

Decolonization as a tangible unknown leaves room for dialogue and for dissent, as well as for coming together to each contribute to one another’s shared visions and goals. We don’t write this as a conclusion because the end of the story has not been written and, in truth, the story isn’t even linear in that way. Indigenous stories circle back, are performed and re-performed, and, with each telling and re-telling a new layer is added, a new truth revealed.

Queering, too, in its continued decolonizing actions and enactments can plough on in hopes of peeling, telling, re-telling, and adding new layers to contemporary Adivasi indigeneity, its politics, and possibilities.

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CLASSIC BOOK REVIEW

Something About Love

bell hooks (2001) *All about Love: New Visions*. New York: Perennial.

ISBN: 9780060959470

Several years ago, when I first read bell hooks' book *All About Love*, then already a classic, it spoke to me in words which I had yearned to hear for years, or decades, really. It talked about how we are all wounded and vulnerable. It talked about how woundedness should not be a cause for shame, as it is necessary for our spiritual growth and awakening. It beautifully described how accepting our vulnerability and embracing our wounds instead of being ashamed of them can help us in processes of healing. When I feel hurt, sad or disempowered, I often return to this book again.

All About Love is, however, much more than a book about personal traumas and individual processes of healing. It is a book that conceptualizes love from a social, political, and collective perspective. Obviously, hooks is not the only scholar who theorizes love in this way – consider, for example, philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari as well as Hardt and Negri – but she addresses the theme in the framework of patriarchy, developing the concept of love especially in the context of feminist scholarship.

The book consists of 13 chapters, preceded by an intimate preface as well as an introduction chapter. Hence, it will not be possible to go into great detail in this short review. In what follows, I will try to focus on those perspectives of the book which may be of interest to the readers of the *Journal of Resistance Studies*.

In the introduction, hooks critically discusses the existing literature on love while differentiating her own approach from others. She is very critical of the normal usage of the concept of love as it often “devalues and degrades its meaning” (p. 14). In chapter 1, hooks defines love as “the will to nurture our own and another’s spiritual growth” (p. 6). One of her main arguments is that “love is as love does” (p. 14), that

is, love should not be considered a feeling but a practice. According to hooks, love cannot co-exist with abuse or neglect – instead, it materializes through acts of care, nurturance, trust, respect, knowing, commitment, and responsibility. This argument is strengthened in chapter 2 as hooks demonstrates that love cannot exist without justice, reflecting especially on the relationship between parents and children in this context. As childhood is the place where we first learn about love, hooks regards “unkind and/or cruel punishment meted out by the grown-ups they have been taught they should love and respect” (p. 17–18) as extremely harmful and confusing for children. In chapter 3 this is followed by discussion on patriarchal masculinity, lying, lovelessness, estrangement from feelings, the inability to connect with others, and the inability to assume responsibility for causing pain, all of which can be resisted, according to hooks, only through commitment to honesty and being true to love.

Throughout the book, hooks moves smoothly and sometimes surprisingly fast from an analysis of broader power structures (which are considered only partly external) to the personal, turning the gaze inwards. In chapter 4, she explicitly highlights the importance of self-acceptance and self-love as the foundation of the practice of love: “Giving ourselves love we provide our inner being with the opportunity to have the unconditional love we may have always longed to receive from someone else” (p. 67). If one is incapable of accepting and loving oneself, efforts to love others are destined to fail. What is beautiful in this conception of love is the strong emphasis placed on how we must not only avoid hurting others but also ourselves – that the practice of self-care and a kind, respectful, loving attitude towards oneself creates a basis for treating others in the same way. At the same time, it is important to uphold the willingness to stand up for oneself, that is, to practice “self-assertiveness” which is still too often regarded as “a threat to femininity” due to the requirement for girls and women to behave in a certain way, to be “good girls or dutiful daughters” (p. 59), which is very different from what is expected from boys and men.

Some of hooks’ most interesting arguments are presented in chapter 5. She analyzes the literatures of the 1960s and 1970s, showing how love used to be celebrated as an active spiritual force with the potential of uniting all life. Much of the discussion on love back then vigorously

critiqued all forms of domination, oppression, violence, and dehumanization, as well as the marriage between capitalism and exploitation. As hooks points out, the focus later shifted from this important politicization of love to something very different: “Much as I enjoy popular New Age commentary on love, I am often struck by the dangerous narcissism fostered by spiritual rhetoric that pays so much attention to individual self-improvement and so little to the practice of love within the context of community” (p. 76). In the context of her own understanding of spirituality, hooks emphasizes that spiritual practices do not necessarily need to be connected to any organized religions to be meaningful, but it is possible for people to find their own sacred ways, for example, by “communicating with the natural world and engaging in practices that honor life-sustaining ecosystems” (p. 81). Recognizing that for many people it is unusual to “turn to spiritual thinking” unless they are experiencing serious difficulties in their lives, hooks talks a lot about the meaning of pain and sorrow, building on the conviction that the “place of suffering” can also be a “place of peace and possibility” if given a possibility to become accepted as such (p. 80). Although she does not give concrete advice on how to accomplish this, she refers to meditation and various spiritual practices many times in this context.

Perhaps the most timely part of the book is chapter 6 with regard to contemporary political debate on refugees, migration, and the rise of right-wing parties across Europe and the US. Regarding fear as the primary force maintaining the structures of domination – such as racism and patriarchy – hooks reminds us that if we are continuously being taught “that safety lies always within the sameness, then difference, of any kind, will appear as a threat” (p. 93). According to her, the mechanism is the same whether we talk about racism or patriarchy – they both rely on “socializing everyone to believe that in all human relations there is an inferior and a superior party” (p. 97), which then works to justify and legitimize various forms of domination, oppression, and exploitation. For hooks, the only way to struggle against fear is to connect with others, “to find ourselves in the other” (p. 93) by embracing an ethic of love based on care, respect, trust, commitment, and responsibility in our everyday lives.

In chapter 7 the ethic of love becomes intertwined with the ethic

of communalism through interdependency, the sharing of resources and the principle of “living simply” instead of material greed and overconsumption that subsume love and compassion and are fuelled by “spiritual and emotional lack in our lives” (p. 105). According to hooks, the “passion to possess” has replaced the “passion to connect” (p. 105–106), resulting in serious consequences. She links greedy consumption with dehumanization, arguing that it results inevitably in people being treated as objects – while choosing to live simply, on the contrary, contributes to our capacity to love and practice compassion. The relationship between patriarchy and capitalism is explored in more detail in chapter 8. Interestingly from the perspective of resistance studies, hooks is convinced that challenging these interconnected structures of domination is possible without necessarily joining any organized movements for social change by simply starting “the process of making community where we are” (p. 143). Clearly, this view is in tension with many traditional frameworks for social change built on instrumental, state-centric and/or masculinist conceptualizations of political subjectivity and social transformation, and comes closer to anarchist and autonomous traditions, as well as approaches in which the political is understood essentially as prefigurative and immanent.

In talking about forgiveness and servitude to others as acts of generosity, both of which are essential for spiritual growth and communal love, hooks takes up an issue which has a very special meaning in the context of nonviolent resistance – the willingness to sacrifice. Whereas it often represents more of a strategic approach in the context of non-violence, manifesting also courage as well as commitment, for hooks the willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others is rather reflective of “our awareness of interdependency” (p. 143). She continues this discussion in chapter 9 through a reflection of the principle of mutual practice of giving and receiving, combined with the principle of sharing resources, whether time, money, attention, or care, which she considers very concrete ways to express love. Through giving, receiving, and sharing, love gains its meaning: again, through action, love materializes as a practice. This idea continues through chapter 10, which deals with romance, and chapter 11 in which the most intriguing part of the discussion revolves around death. The worship of death is, according to hooks, especially

powerful in Western traditions, and intimately related to the fear of the stranger: “We believe the stranger is a messenger of death who wants our life... Even though we are more likely to be hurt by someone we know than a stranger, our fear is directed toward the unknown and the unfamiliar” (p. 193). In hooks’ view, the worship of death can be resisted by challenging patriarchy, working for peace and justice through the practice of love, and by giving away the fear of dying. As knowing how to love is also a way of knowing how to die, it “empowers us to live fully and die well” (p. 197). In this way, death becomes an integral part of living, instead of being an “abject” to be separated from life.

In chapters 12 and 13, hooks returns to the theme of wounding and healing, but focuses more attention on religion, reminding the reader that patriarchal perspectives have always strongly influenced religions. Although clearly articulating her interest in Christian traditions, hooks’ spiritual practices and beliefs also resonate with Buddhist approaches. According to her, it is not accidental “that so many of the spiritual teachers we gravitate to in our affluent society, which is driven by the ethos of rugged individualism, come from cultures that value interdependency and working for a collective good over independence and individual gain” (p. 214). From the Buddhist tradition she introduces, among other things, the idea of “surrendering”, which as a practice enables the creation of spaces of compassion where one can feel sympathy for oneself and others, thereby defying judgment as well as shame, both of which characterize patriarchy.

What makes these views interesting from the point of view of resistance studies is that in talking about the practice of love as something revolutionary, hooks suggest that one must “surrender the will to power”, stressing that it is impossible to “know love if we remain unable to surrender our attachment to power” (p. 221). Moreover, she argues that all significant social movements that have struggled for freedom and justice have promoted love as their ethical foundation. While gaining recognition for challenging the traditional masculinist conceptions and definition of politics as the distinction between friend and enemy, hooks’ concept of love has attracted some critical questions in regard to the relationship between the particular/local and the universal/global, with some scholars pointing out that “love” may be very well replacing God

in the secularized West. Despite the communal nature of hooks' conceptualization of love, the book has also been criticized for individualism, probably due to her very personal narratives combined with a sort of a "therapeutic" touch that we have become accustomed to interpret in a very particular way in the context of medicalized Western discourses. It is not entirely unjustified to criticize the book, on the one hand, for its essentializing critique of men and masculinity, and on the other hand, for its heteronormativity, the relationship between men and women being such a central theme in the book.

There are, however, many different ways to interpret hooks' arguments, some of which can potentially escape the above mentioned tensions. This can be done by approaching love from non-totalizing perspectives, in which love is not granted the position of God or Truth, and by taking conscious steps away from universalizing frameworks by embracing diversity both in the practice of love and with regard to its ontology and epistemology. From the perspective of resistance and resistance studies, the practice of love has potentially a lot to offer, for what hooks writes about care, community, and commitment can be seen taking place in many places across the globe where women come together to struggle against domination, oppression, dispossession, neoliberalism, patriarchy, racism, and sexism. One of the biggest challenges lies in how to promote this idea to a broader audience beyond feminist scholarship. Love and feminist solidarity are conceptually easy to connect with each other, but it is more demanding in the case of love and resistance. How can love be(come) a form of resistance? How can we resist with love? Can love be(come) the constitutive foundation of resistance? It is my conviction, based on critical perspectives arising from various cross-disciplinary intersections of resistance studies, and considering what is currently taking place in the world and world politics, that the time has come to seriously, and creatively, to address these questions.

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BOOK REVIEW

Precarity as Radical Possibility

Isabell Lorey (2015) *States of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*. London: Verso, ISBN: 9781781685969

In *States of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious* (2015), Isabell Lorey advocates the embrace of precarity as a radical political proposition. In this deceptively short book, Lorey accomplishes a sweeping scope of argument to foreground potential means of resistance that speak to the deeply-rooted insecurity of our times. Lorey opens up political space for agency and disobedience to emerge from within the lived experience of precarious subjects. She asks, what would it mean to take critical distance from those ubiquitous forms of fearfulness that make us susceptible to escalating exploitation? And follows this by delving into examples of political movements whose critical praxis tackles this question. In particular, Lorey foregrounds the open-ended feminized resistances of the collective *Precarias a la Deriva*, whose reflexive, experiential praxis connects precarity with care, and invents new ways to politicize both.

In the first three chapters of the book, Lorey elaborates a novel, multi-layered formulation of the contemporary condition of precarity. Her analysis goes well beyond the now-familiar insecure conditions of employment. Lorey invites us to understand precarization (or the processes that enact precarity) as not a passing episode, but a new mode of regulation that distinguishes our current era. In doing so, Lorey makes a dramatic departure from prevailing social science research on precarity, which has its roots in the work of two prominent French sociologists, Bourdieu and Castel. In their work, precarity is given an exclusively negative meaning, and a conceptual binary is constructed between the secure welfare state, and insecure precarity. However, for Lorey this raises two questions, namely who was already denied adequate protection by welfare state provisions? And in what ways is social insecurity becoming the norm? (p. 42). If precarity is always framed in contrast to a norm of security, it becomes impossible to grasp the contemporary normalization

by which precarity becomes the disciplining norm.

Lorey proposes a conception of precarity with three key dimensions. Firstly, it encompasses the understanding of existential precarity, or “precarious life”, as elaborated by Judith Butler. In this aspect, precarity highlights the vulnerability of a living being due to its dependency on the work of others. Here, Lorey supersedes Butler by marking the significance of reproductive work – noting that precarious life is crucially dependent on care and reproduction (p. 19). Domination turns this existential precariousness into an anxiety towards “threatening” others, who must be preventively neutralized or destroyed in order to protect those who believe themselves under threat.

The second dimension of precarity is concerned with the hierarchization of precariousness, and its differential distribution through relations of inequality. This operates through processes of *othering*. From the formation of the liberal-capitalist state, all those who did not meet the norm of the normalized white propertied male subject, and all those who posed a threat to this norm, were precarized (p. 37). That is, the construction of the other forms a central component of precarity as inequality. Liberal governmentality, even in its welfare-state version, was always dependent on multiple forms of precarity – the precarity of women performing unpaid labor in the reproductive domain of the private sphere; the precarity of all those excluded from the nation-state compromise between capital and labor (as foreign, “abnormal” or poor), and the precarity of peoples living under the extreme dispossession of colonization. Lorey argues that these precarized others are constructed as a threat against which the body politic must be protected. Legitimizing the protection of some – invariably white male citizens – requires deepening the precarity of those deemed other. By using precarity in this way, as a structural category which orders hierarchical relations of violence and inequality (p. 38), Lorey establishes a structural dimension which is lacking in the Foucauldian notion of governmentality. Moreover, Lorey argues that the production of precarity as relations of systemic inequality is rooted in the bourgeois mode of governing from its inception. This points to potential histories of feminized ruptures. The view that precarity is not new but has a history, and an inherently gendered one – since women as reproductive laborers and women as colonial subjects were al-

ways precarized – suggests also a history of feminized resistances which have repeatedly disturbed the governmental order, and from which we might learn.

The third dimension of precarity Lorey explores is precarization as governmentality: as mode of governing that instrumentalizes insecurity. She strives to problematize the complex interrelation between an instrument of governing, economic exploitation, and modes of subjectivation, in the ambivalence between subjugation and empowerment. Here, she puts Foucault's analysis of biopolitical governmentality to good work. In Foucault's conception, biopolitics developed when life entered politics from the late eighteenth-century onwards, when governing began to concern itself with the preservation of each individual to serve the productivity of the state (p. 25). This follows the Foucauldian understanding that "governing" does not consist primarily in overt repression, but in orchestrating an internalized self-regulation; the orchestration of self-conduct.

Lorey argues that from the formation of capitalism to the present, the wealth of the state depends on the health of its population. Therefore, the policies of bourgeois-liberal government have concerned themselves with producing and then securing normality, requiring that every individual govern and normalize themselves. With the biopolitical demand to orient oneself to what is normal, everyone must adopt a relation to themselves – their own bodies and lives – that is primarily driven by self-regulation. For, "it is precisely through the way they conduct themselves, how they govern themselves, that individuals become amenable to social, political and economic steering and regulation" (p. 35). From a governmental perspective, acts of "self-empowerment" are rendered deeply ambivalent. Rather than being inherently emancipatory, these practices of apparent self-empowerment can signify modes of self-governing that represent a conformist self-determination that in fact enables extraordinary governability. This latter point resonates strongly with feminist critiques of the focus on individual-based "empowerment" which permeates institutional policy-making on gender in the neoliberal era (cf. Phillips, 2013).

Thus Lorey demonstrates that biopolitical self-conduct is not entirely a neoliberal phenomenon, but rather reaches back to the origins of

the bourgeois state. Here again, Lorey marks a departure from Foucault, for whom the “entrepreneur of the self” emerges only with neoliberal governmentality. But in noting this continuity in bourgeois-liberal governmentality, Lorey is adamant that self-conduct is never total or univocal. The active participation of each individual in the reproduction of governing techniques never serves only subordination (p. 35). In the ambivalence between subjugation and empowerment, self-government does not necessarily always comply with the dominant discipline, but can enable immanent struggles to take form.

In Chapter 4, Lorey outlines what is new in the neoliberal era: the use of precarization as an instrument of governing. In neoliberalism, while the precarity of the marginalized retains its threatening potential, precarization is transformed into a normalized political-economic instrument. Consequently, the traditional boundaries between the social positionings of the normal and the precarized are dissolving. The “imaginary centre of the normal” (p. 68) is not simply threatened, it becomes itself increasingly insecure and threatening, lashing out with panic-like reactions such as “securing borders” – a loaded term which encapsulates the logic of protection for some, at the expense of violence for countless others. Everyone is precaritized, sooner or later. But this plays out in uneven and disproportionately brutal ways for those who find themselves at the wrong end of a gendered, racialized class hierarchy.

Insecuritization as policy produces insecurity as the core preoccupation of the subject. In the guise of “active self-design” (p. 70), governmentality calls forth a repressive subjectification that sees self-worth measured on the miserly scale of capacity to seamlessly adjust to waves of ever-escalating demands for speeding-up and flexibilization. In the name of “self-optimization”, the risks and cares of precarization are privatized. Any subject who is not able to carry the considerable risks of precarity *in perpetuity* is automatically blamed and labeled dysfunctional, irredeemably so.

Resistances: Precarity as Possibility

The most invigorating sections of the book are those which delve into questions of resistances, and explore the inventive praxis of key initia-

tives. By now, it is self-evident that the fissures of precarity necessitate a paradigm shift in understandings of what emancipatory practice looks like. For Lorey, this can start from “recognising existential vulnerability as an affirmative basis for politics” (p. 91). Following Judith Butler, precarity in its myriad forms is the starting point for alliances against a logic of “security” for some at the expense of untold misery for many. Thus, to address the question posed above at the outset, “what would it mean to take critical distance from those ubiquitous forms of fearfulness...” would involve generating a critical intimacy (see Motta, 2014 for further details) with others who are located in related but different predicaments of precarity. Here, Lorey builds on a theoretical trajectory foreshadowed in the introduction – one which begins from connectedness with others, without assuming that social relationality is equally accessible to all. She frames this relationality as an entry point into practices of becoming-common, a process of uncovering common interests within the differentness of the precarious, with a view to co-creation of new forms of organizing that rupture “existing forms of governing in a refusal of obedience” (p. 15).

In chapter 6, *Care Crisis and Care Strike*, Lorey foregrounds the pioneering praxis of Precarias a la Deriva who articulate and embody a feminist counter-point to precarization. The Precarias focus on prevailing logics of security in order to thoroughly break through them. Lorey offers a lively and perceptive overview of their praxis, a kind of militant research that echoes traditions of co-research emanating from the Italian workers movement of the 70s, and feminist consciousness-raising groups. The Precarias begin from their own experiences of precarity, and explore these together with others in “interviews in movement”, carried out during a series of “derives” or free-form collective walks through the city (p. 92). They note a multi-dimensional care crisis which is inseparable from precarization. Against the logic of security, the Precarias counterpose the notion of “care community”, inspired by a logic of care (p. 95). The focus of their socio-political strategy is enhancing the status of care, not as a “feminine duty” but the right to give and receive care in dignity. Lorey discusses the Precarias’ call for a care strike – in which care work is not suspended, but rather shifted to the centre of life, thereby interrupting “business as usual”. The care strike challenges the social

relations that render care as feminine, unproductive, and private. These social relations are “striked” by producing excesses that flee from the interests of profit. This flight is already underway in everyday life, but needs to be articulated and interlinked (p. 97).

In the final chapter, *Exodus and Constituting*, Lorey works with Virno’s notion of exodus to emphasize that within the ambivalence of self-governmentality lurks the potential for disobedience. Such an exodus does not lead outside of power, but would be an exodus within power relations themselves, that rejects neoliberal self-conduct and tries out new modes of disobedience (p. 102). This could bring to life a model of self-conduct as autonomy by and for precarious subjects, or what could be a dynamic of “becoming ungovernable”. Lorey highlights the practices of the EuroMayday network as embodying such a movement of exodus, a space of constituting new collective subjectivities that affirm “precarious” as self-designation. Its resistive practices concentrate on what the precarious have in common in all their differentness, to avoid newly separating the manifold precarious. Alliances arose in the network between cultural producers, migrant organizations, initiatives of the unemployed, collectives of illegalized persons, and labor unions. In both the Precarias and the EuroMayDay, Lorey notes an emphasis on generating “common notions” in Spinoza’s sense of notions arising from our existence as living beings, in order to discern what is commonly shared. So too, both initiatives utilize alternative practices of knowledge production like militant research, to map “everyday life uneasiness and insubordinations” (Malo de Molina, cited on p. 111). Lorey’s account is rich material for anyone looking to develop an engaged research praxis along similar lines.

One limitation in Lorey’s argument concerns the way in which governmentality deploys othering as a means to precaritize those who are not the protected male citizen. Here she names women performing reproductive labor, and peoples living under colonialism. While there are indeed strong parallels here, Lorey conflates an important distinction. This is, in brief, that the subjecthood (however partial) accorded even to proletarian women in imperialist countries was premised on the total denial of subjecthood to colonized peoples. Afro Pessimist theory argues that the colonial other is defined as a non-subject (cf. Moten, 2013), and

so must first claim subjecthood, which is already available to women of colonizer countries. It would have been preferable to see more nuance on this point.

Nonetheless, this book offers a very incisive framework for understanding how we are placed within regimes of neoliberal governmentality, in a manner that somehow appears voluntary, and how we might begin to conduct ourselves otherwise. Lorey's work deftly synthesizes previously disparate ideas, particularly the linking of othering, reproductive labor, and precarity. Her exploration of the possible "uses" of insecurity, via close engagement with movement praxis, is a refreshing contrast to prevailing discourse on the topic. While governmental precarization is designed to make individuals governable through insecurity, a one-sided focus on danger and threat elides the potentiality of resistive reversal or flight. In the small insubordinations of precarious everyday life, the disciplining self-conduct is subverted time and again. Through these resistances, the precarious have the potential to refuse to be divided and dispersed, and thereby transform contingency from a threat into a space of radical openness.

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**Engler, Mark and Paul, This is an Uprising: How
Nonviolent Revolt is Shaping the Twenty-First Century**

New York: Nation Books, 2016

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A lot has been written about strategic nonviolent action since Gene Sharp published his seminal book on “The politics of Nonviolent Action” in 1972. Paul and Mark Engler’s book more or less sums it up. However, the oeuvre is more than an introduction into the world of strategic non-violence. It is a primer into the ideas of peaceful mobilization for social change and an exploration of the American history of popular protest and uprising. In short: it is a book for people trying to understand social change, and those trying to create it.

Mark and Paul Engler are no unknowns. Mark is an editorial board member of “Dissent”, one of America’s leading intellectual journals on political ideas, and the author of “How to rule the world”, a book on the crisis of neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, and the hope that both will be overcome by a more “democratic globalization”. Paul is the founding Director of the Center for the Working Poor and has more than ten years of experiences in the global justice and labor movement. Both together publish short articles on democracyuprising.com, which focuses on specific aspects or episodes of the book.

“This in an uprising” takes Gene Sharp and his personal journey from pacifism towards Strategic Nonviolent Action as a starting point and skillfully mixes Sharp’s personal episodes and anecdotes with the development of his ideas. This biographical approach to explain the development of thoughts and theories is used throughout the whole book, making it easy to read and providing the reader with interesting information on key figures of social movements in America on the fly.

The authors also refer to Martin Luther King’s civil rights movements and Gandhi’s defiance campaign as “classic” historical examples of nonviolent action. However, their strong focus on Sharp and his con-

ceptualization of power and understanding of nonviolence as strategic, rather than principled, action also represents a shortcoming of the book as it leaves other concepts widely unattended.

In the second chapter, Engler and Engler address a basic problem everyone engaged in social change must face: whether to follow a movement-based or structure-oriented approach. The ideas of the first tradition are exemplified by Fox Piven and Richard Cloward's theories on social movements and are contrasted with Saul D. Alinsky's approach of structure-oriented community organizing. The authors eventually conclude that the marriage between both approaches represents a major breakthrough.

As an example for such a hybrid between a momentum-driven movement and structure-based organization, the authors present the example of Otpor's resistance against Milosevic in Serbia. Protests against Milosevic started in 1996, but reached a dead end in late 1997 and left many activists feeling discouraged and depressed. Many faded out of the activities as a result. In order to overcome the problem of volatility of the protests, Otpor was founded and introduced some aspects of community organizing. To form a sustainable movement, the activists decided to rely on small groups (mostly built up by friends) to provide these activists with special training, to build local capacity for action, and to unite these groups loosely under the banner of Otpor and the common goal to bring down Milosevic. This hybrid strategy slowed Otpor's achievement of its goals, but sustained the movement over the next three years. In the end, however, the movement was not able to survive after the ultimate goal was reached. Otpor proved itself incapable of influencing post-transition politics as a party, and did not spawn watchdog organizations outside the parliament.

After providing this example of nonviolent action that had rather mixed results, Engler and Engler address in the following chapters critical points for the success of a movement. First, drawing on Sharp's theory of power, they emphasize the importance of the movement's capacity to direct its power against the "pillars of support" of the given regime and to split the forces of the opponent. Further, pointing at the example of the "Occupy Wall Street" movement, they highlight the importance of disruption as a critical element of successful nonviolent action. While

conventional protests like the “One Nation Working together” protest march on Washington drew more than 175 000 protestors in October 2010, it did not create the same momentum as “Occupy”, which disrupted everyday life to a greater extent. In the same sense, Engler and Engler discuss the “ACT UP” movement which polarized the country by criticizing the government’s reaction to the spread of AIDS during the late 1980s. As a so-called “divider” movement it proved to be successful since it mobilized former neutral bystanders by polarizing the political landscape. Finally, the authors focus on the aspect of discipline and consequent nonviolent strategies by referring to the history of “Earth first”, a militant group which became famous for tree spiking. When this strategy backfired, “Earth First!” adopted a strategy of consequent non-violence and upheld this strategy even after key activists were attacked. This resilience eventually triggered mass mobilization and guaranteed the group’s success.

The authors provide a rich variety of both historical and contemporary examples of nonviolent resistance and campaigns throughout the book. However, the piece focuses very much on the history of American social movements with only a few excursions to other central movements in the history of nonviolent resistance, like Ghandi’s Salt March and defiance campaign or Otpor’s struggle to overthrow Milosevic.

In the end, Mark and Paul Engler’s contribution is an attempt to overcome the dilemma of effective mass mobilization and sustainable change by combining the existing theoretical approaches on nonviolent action. According to the authors, “mass mobilization alter[s] the term of political debate and create[s] new possibilities for progress; structure-based organizing helps take advantage of this potential and protects against efforts to roll back advances; and countercultural communities preserve progressive values, nurturing dissidents who go to initiate the next waves of revolt” (Engler and Engler 2016, p. 253). In other words, they propose a division of labor to transition successful social mobilization into sustainable social change.

However, while this book and its approach of combining different strategies is innovative, it has shortcomings as well. The book is generally biased towards the positive role civil society plays in the formation of movements and grassroots community organizations. This might be

rooted in the fact that the authors have been engaged in the business of organizing and protest for decades. However, civil society does not necessarily advance in a progressive direction. If we think of the civil rights campaign in the US, we also have to consider the Ku Klux Klan and several other extremist “uncivil” movements. This relevant debate on the “uncivil civil society”, however, remains unmentioned.

Furthermore, the authors themselves admit that several questions remain open, namely structural problems and potential conflicts of interest between activists following the different approaches of momentum-driven campaigns, and structure-oriented organizing as well as the coordination problem. How, for example, should the proposed division of labor between momentum-driven campaigns like “Occupy” and structure-oriented organizations like classical unions be organized? Should they be organized by a common committee in advance or is it the spontaneous outcome of the protest itself? What if there is no organization taking up the effort to secure the achievements of a social movement? How is going to do the job? It would have advanced the field of resistance studies if the authors had considered such questions.

Nonetheless, the book is one of my 2016-favourites on the topic. It has great value as an introduction and an informed overview, which predestines it as course book on social movements and nonviolent action.

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