

Cartographies of the Present: Re-inscribing / Unveiling Critical Maternal Epistemologies

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Andrew İcin - O Diyorki: “Yazacaksın. Çünkü yazmak senin kararım.” Şubat 23, 2013.

In *Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited*, Deleuzian philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2003) expresses a “need for renewed conceptual creativity and for politically informed *cartographies* of the present” (p. 45). Critical auto/biographical mapping of women’s narratives, and the multiple intersections between/with/in them is my personal political response to Braidotti’s call for cartographic research, as it was re/iterated to her students during the 2014 University of Utrecht Summer School.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe the coding of chess pieces in their chapter on *Nomadology and the War Machine* in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Through an analysis of this auto/biographic cartography, I work to unveil how I have been coded as a western white Anglophone mother, woman, daughter, consumer, citizen. In her book *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti (2011) writes that:

The point of nomadic subjectivity is to identify lines of flight, that is to say, a creative alternative space of becoming that would fall not between the mobile/immobile, the resident/the foreigner distinction, but within all these categories. The point is neither to dismiss nor to glorify the status of marginal, alien others, but to find a more accurate,

complex location for a transformation of the very terms of their specification and of our political interaction. (p. 7)

By re-writing this particular cartography from previously written journals, I aim to “activate... multiple becoming's, away from identity” (Braidotti, 2003, p. 53) that interrupt onto-epistemological codings for class, citizenship, gender and humanisms. As an avid journal writer, I use writing and re-writing to explore my own nomadic subjectivities.

Becoming Mother, Chicken, Arachnid: Re-inscribing Epistemologies

Before moving to Izmir, Turkey in January of 1999 as a migrant elementary school teacher, my only contact with Middle Eastern women and children was through my uninformed viewing of newscasts that advertised the Gulf War in the early 90's. I was graduating from high school in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and remember racing home to turn my western “gaze” (Hladki, 2001, p. 45) toward the east through the evening news. Media clips bolstering Canadian support for American military trysts were on the television. War promotion was broadcast to me, in Newfoundland, because Canada is a member of an international coalition that began the war against Iraq. The “state apparatus,” (p. 513), as termed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), needed Canadians to be on board with western white colonial capitalistic support. Some of the advertisements for war, disguised as the news, consisted of military aircraft, various tanks and guns and photos of *men* in uniform. In their paper titled *A Feminist Ethical Perspective on Weapons of Mass Destruction*, Carol Cohn and Sara Ruddick (2003) discuss how cultures are created “in which war is seen as morally legitimate, even alluring; and

shape and foster the masculinities and femininities which undergird men's and women's acquiescence to war” (p. 4). Hannah Arendt (2006), in her work titled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, said that, “so many were like him, and the many were neither perverted nor sadistic,... they were terribly and terrifyingly normal” (p. 276). In re-visiting my previous journal writings about this viewing, I wonder how that particular media from the 90's worked to code war culture and militaristic aggression within and around me as terrifyingly normal.

Along with the traditional masculinist style of war images there were occasionally the images of women, children and chickens in dusty gardens. These images caught my eye and interest. Some of the people and animals were positioned in front of broken stone homes with clay tile roofs, which were different from the wooden homes that were popular in my location on the planet at that time. Aligned with traditional war photos, these images were intended to reinforce the “phallogocentric imaginary” (Braidotti, 2003, p. 45). Men in uniform posing with military jets were a stark contrast to the images of tattered clothing on women and children in dusty gardens.

While not quite the pornography of war violence that is becoming the new normal, with decapitation and live burning videos, and photos of mass graves on twitter and facebook, as Braidotti discussed in her 2014 Utrecht Summer School lectures, those images of women, children and chickens were equally purposeful. Thinking through Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and their chapter, *Treatise on Nomadology - The War Machine* in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I re/view the function of the media images as working with “state apparatus” (p. 352) to code citizens with a

particular “internal nature and intrinsic properties from which our (their) movements, situations, and confrontations derive” (p. 352). The coding intentions of that combination of war images was to globally, culturally, politically, intellectually, religiously, ethnically, ethically self-locate Westerners in Europe and North America as positive; in a position of wealth, privilege, knowledge and power over the targeted middle eastern social strata counterparts – in my case the women and children. The binary flipside of this coding scheme for Westerners located Middle Eastern peoples as intrinsically oppressed, deprived, ignorant and even deviant, as a result of their own poor choice of nativity, ethnic origin, religion and available building materials. The work of these images was to position the women and children as different from the men, and the western viewers, and therefore lacking or suffering and in need of western military cowboy-style saviours.

In *Nomadic Subjects* (2011), Rosi Braidotti writes that: In the European history of philosophy, "difference" is a central concept insofar as Western thought has always functioned through dualistic oppositions that create subcategories of otherness or "difference-from." Because, in this history, difference has been predicated on relations of domination and exclusion, to be different-from came to mean to be "less than," to be worth less than. Difference has been colonized by power relations that reduce it to inferiority. Difference consequently acquired essentialist and lethal connotations; it made *entire categories of being* disposable, that is to say, just as human, but slightly more mortal. (p. 138)

Through media repetitions of “different-from” I was supposed to be seduced by a multi-faceted scheme of “master narratives” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 170). Master narratives propagate dominant value systems by promoting status quo and *difference* that maintains binary flavoured xenophobic values for you, in the comfort of your own western home, depending on where you read the news or catch trending tweets. Many master narratives rank humans and their knowledges, and place them hierarchically above animals, insects and arachnids. Similarly, there are humans who locate themselves above and beyond both nature and technology. Braidotti (2002) has said that, “Since antiquity, animals have been associated with technology and machines... because they allegedly lack an innate soul and consequently a will and a sovereign subjectivity of their own” (p. 126). Traditional western philosophies of difference promote the west and Judeo-Christian tradition over the east and Islam. The same style of master narrative places power with the “state apparatus” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 513) over citizens. Dualistic definitions of difference maintain rigid hierarchies of citizenship and “relations among States” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 360). Rankings and privilege may differ depending on your linguistic, religious, sexual, ethnic, economic affiliations and orientations.

The media images from the early 90’s were intentionally designed to entice the intellect and the imagination of Westerners far away from issues like the sale and slavery of women and children, organs and animals, environmental impacts of fossil fuel consumption and war-making, which have significant consequences for humans and the planet. While it is not the purpose of this paper to delve into the politics of war crimes¹ and

¹ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006.

oil gains, retracing this cartography of multiple becomings refigures the image of women, children, chickens and even the dust in the dusty gardens. In Deleuzian terms, as Braidotti (2003) explains, “Becoming nomadic means you learn to reinvent yourself and you desire the self as a process of transformation. It’s about the desire for change, for flows and shifts of multiple desires. Deleuze is no romantic. Deleuze’s nomadology stresses the need for a change of conceptual schemes altogether” (p. 53).

For that reason, I do mean to belabour the point of the chickens in the war propaganda images of dusty gardens. The bodies of the chickens represent an important site where several conceptual schemes intersect. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “the state apparatus constitutes the form of interiority we habitually take as a model, or according to which we are in the habit of thinking” (p. 354). The sovereignty of states, they say, “reigns over what it is capable of internalizing, of appropriating locally” (p. 354). Locally, in Newfoundland, and in many places, food is appropriated and controlled. Food is important for controlling human bodies. Secluded mechanized farming practices and various fishing moratoriums that freed workers for factories meant that I grew up not knowing where my food came from. A part of classed habits of thinking also meant that we were taught to be careful of chicken meat and that it could be dangerous. Many chickens later, I have begun to question these kinds of hegemonic capitalistic practices by learning about how chickens are mass farmed for efficient human consumption without concern for the quality of life of the chicken. This is an example of how commercializing and commoditizing species anesthetises human consumers so that we are not wont to question or critically engage with the politics of the oppression employed by supposedly advanced capitalistic cultures of ethics

on which we readily gorge ourselves. Again classed, by being located in specialty stores and more expensive shops and markets, this is changing now in Atlantic Canada. There is an upsurge of support for people to eat local and to learn about where your food comes from.

Re-figuring my Episto-ontological Relationship with/through/to Myself

Several assemblages of interconnecting lines of flight within this cartography have shifted me from Newfoundland as a single person, in the early 1990s to New Brunswick for university, to marry in Izmir and live there for nearly fifteen years and back to New Brunswick as a single mother. One of the parts of my episto-ontological cartography through Güzelbahçe, Izmir was scorpion life in my very own, mostly dusty, Middle Eastern garden. Additionally, bees, snakes, lizards, bats and hummingbirds were among my garden community. I was formally introduced to the scorpions one summer evening while traipsing about the yard in bare feet at 11 o'clock at night, even though I had been repeatedly warned against ever doing so by my mother-in-law. During nights, after the day-temperature had reached upwards of 45°C, spots of grass were sometimes cool and damp. The Newfoundlander-me could not resist. My birth sign of the zodiac is scorpion, but I was not the only scorpion enjoying the cool garden grass that evening. I stepped on the scorpion's head and she duly whipped up her tail and stung my ankle in protest.

She lived. I know because I watched her scurry away. I wondered whether I would be as fortunate. Scorpions are resilient. It was an excruciating 24-hour marathon without anti-

venom. The next day, I returned home to be severely chastised by my mother-in-law, Anne. Her reprimand was clear: no such thing would have ever happened if I had kept chickens in the yard, like any sensible woman. By not having chickens, I had placed my self and the children at unnecessary mortal risk. *Her aklıbaşındaki kadın gibi tavukların olsaydı, bunların hiç biri olmazdı ve kimsenin hayatını tehlikeye koymazdın.* She had always kept, and been kept by, chickens. And so had her mothers. Chickens eat scorpions, and anything in the form of insect, arachnid or lizard that moves. I understand this to be a genealogical maternal located knowledge - that chickens are mothers and you always mother with chickens in the some locations in the Middle East. I remember taking a newspaper clipping during the same week that I was stung. It was about a two-year-old child who was killed by a scorpion sting in the nearby town of Selçuk. The child's family probably did not have chickens in their garden either.

I claim this work as *my* re-figuring of women, children, and chickens in the dusty gardens through multiple-othered lenses, when in fact the scorpion has done much of the work. The chickens in the original war images were a “companion species” (Haraway, 2008, p. 208) and the relationship between the chickens and humans is interdependent. That chickens were present in the dusty gardens is evidence of intergenerational local maternal knowledges. “Deleuze’s nomadology stresses the need for a change of conceptual schemes altogether. An overcoming of the dialectic of majority/minority or master/slave,” (Braidotti, 2003, p. 53), man/woman, adult/child, human/animal, human/insect. Re-tracing this cartography; re-memembering these unpredictable and often accidental assemblages that slip me in/between/around/through/toward multiple becomings disrupt

binary codes and hierarchies of difference opening new spaces for potential becoming and transformative power. This is but one example of multiple and simultaneous cartographic intersections between women, children, animals, and arachnids with mis/representations of their lives and knowledges. Continuing to think through Deleuze, I advocate for continuing critical cartographic research that reveal generative powers of complex and multiple knowledges. Additional cartographies contribute to the knowledge of maternal and pedagogical thought and practices of women who move around the planet with their children as migrant workers, immigrants, or increasingly to Canada, as 25,000 new refugees are expected to arrive by the end of 2016.

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