

NOMADIC FEMINISM: FOUR LINES OF FLIGHT

Zeina Al Azmeh, MA
Qatar University, Qatar

Abstract

Since its first wave in the late nineteenth century, feminism has reached a legitimation crisis the emergence from which is critical for its survival as a political movement. Several subjective figurations have been proposed by feminists and theorists in order to enable a leap beyond the impasses that feminism faces today.

In this paper, the subjective figuration of the Nomad is explored as presented by Rosi Braidotti and inspired by poststructuralist theory, in particular the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. It is suggested that if feminism has been disserved by the second wave's adoption of rigid masculinist structures, then the fluid ways of nomadic subjectivity provide valuable tools for advancing it.

The argument is formulated around the Deleuzian concept of 'lines of flight' suggesting four ways in which nomadic theory offers exit lines from significant impasses confronting contemporary feminism. It is suggested that these exist lines carry potential to move the feminist movement beyond its current stasis; beyond postmodernist cynicism; beyond linear, hierarchical and exclusionary phallogocentrism; and most significantly beyond an outdated reactive and dogmatic feminism.

Keywords: Nomadism, Feminism, Deleuze, Braidotti

Introduction

Since its rise in the late nineteenth century with a powerful first wave, feminism has reached within a century a legitimation crisis the emergence from which is critical for any prospect for its survival as a political movement. A trust crisis between mainstream women and feminism was being addressed as early as 1991; a backlash whose workings are for the most part 'encoded and internalised' (Faludi, 2006, p. xxii). In 1993, the same studies that indicated strong majority support for feminist ideals showed that most women hesitate to affiliate themselves with the movement (Kaminer, 1993). By the end of the 90s, the excesses of 'gender feminists' of the second wave who dominated the women's movement with an 'ideology of men as abusers and women as victims' (Levit, 1998), ensured that enthusiasm for feminism would wane. Today, in a twenty-first century of postfeminist and postmodernist impasses, feminism is thirsty for creative figurations¹⁸ that offer alternative subjectivities with new frameworks, perspectives, and modes of thought; not only beyond the rigid structures and 'perversely monological mental habits of phallogocentrism' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 2), but also beyond the reactive dogmatic approaches of traditional feminism that led to stasis and an apparent redundancy in the movement following the political accomplishments of its second wave.

Several such figurations have been proposed by feminists, from Donna Haraway's cyborg to Irigaray's Goddess and Cixous' Medusa. One that strikes as particularly relevant to

¹⁸ Braidotti defines a figuration as a "politically informed account of an alternative subjectivity" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, 1994)

the issue of formulating a feminist figuration attuned to feminine dispositions¹⁹ is Nomadism as presented by Rosi Braidotti's work and inspired by poststructuralist theory, in particular the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. If feminism has been disserved by its second wave's adoption of rigid masculinist structures and methods²⁰, then the fluid feminine structures²¹ of nomadic theory provide valuable tools for advancing it.

I will formulate my arguments around the Deleuzian concept of 'lines of flight' suggesting four ways in which nomadic theory offers exit lines from significant impasses confronting contemporary feminism. But before getting started, let's begin by defining nomadic feminism.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the nomad as a person who is constantly between points of arrival, characterized by continuous movement and change.

The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.)... although the points determine paths, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine, the reverse of what happens with the sedentary. The water point is reached only in order to be left behind; every point is a relay and exists only as a relay. A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988, p. 380)

Rosi Braidotti takes this figuration further by reworking it into feminist theory.²² Building on the premise that nomadism entails a total dissolution of the notion of a centre and consequently of imaginary sites of authentic identities (Braidotti, 1994, p. 5), she delineates the many ways in which nomadic subjectivity lends itself to feminist theory and draws pathways away from stasis through a subjectivity that is heterogeneous, transgressive, deterritorialized, performative and affirmative. This figuration offers a way out of the phallogocentric vision of the subject. Braidotti (1994, p. 8) sees in the nomadic state the potential for 'opening up new possibility for life and thought, especially for women.' In the following paragraphs I suggest four lines of flight²³ revealed by nomadic theory to realize such possibility, transporting feminism beyond its most intractable impasses and through the twenty-first century.

I

Beyond stasis and fixity

Feminist writers have long recognized the need for new perspectives to dislodge the movement from its present state of inertia, a state brought on by large-scale female disenchantment with second-wave feminist tactics and rhetoric. This stasis has been aggravated by a general sense of apathy and uncertainty produced by the radical relativism inherent in postmodernist thinking. Braidotti contends that feminist philosophy has moved beyond the premises that mark its beginnings (Braidotti, 2003, p. 211) and shows how the

¹⁹ Whether such dispositions are biologically rooted or socially constructed is not something I will not explore in this essay. However, towards the end of the essay I will discuss how Braidotti reformulates a notion of essentialism that goes beyond essentialist/antiessentialist binarism.

²⁰ This is particularly observable in second wave feminism's dogmatic man-hating bra-burning myths.

²¹ When using the terms 'masculine and feminine structures' I do not refer to an essentialist assumption that any such innate structures exist, but instead to the socially constructed and distinct styles of operation associated with men versus women.

²² Other spatial metaphors abound in feminist politics and scholarship; there are feminist 'geographies' in the visual arts and 'cartographies' of political struggle. 'Politics of location', 'situated knowledges', 'hybridity' and of course 'nomadic identities' are a few such metaphors. (McDowell, 2003, p. 13) Other links have also been made between the work of Deleuze and Guattari and feminist theory.

²³ Miguel Rojas-Sotelo offers a succinct definition of Deleuze's lines of flight as 'the available means of escape from the forces of repression and stratification.' (Lerner)

nomadic figuration can instigate change and thwart stasis through creative alternatives (Braidotti, 1994, p. 2). The invention of new approaches and theoretical tools transposes those same factors perceived as crises of values into spaces of new possibility.

One medium for such a transposition is parody. Nomadism entails a constant state of 'becoming' which refers to as the practice of 'as-if'. It is a technique for strategic relocation that enables us to 'rescue what we need of the past in order to trace paths of transformation of our lives here and now' (Braidotti, 2011, p. 27). The use of parody in the practice of 'as-if' is an affirmation of fluid boundaries and a tool for change that forces us to avoid repetitions which bring about political stagnation, thus opening spaces where new forms of agency can be engendered. The force of the parodic mode, she claims, consists in its potential for opening up, through mimetic repetitions, spaces for alternative forms of agency (Braidotti, 1994, pp. 6-7). Braidotti's Parody, however is not an end in itself or some form of 'fetishist disavowal', she assures, but rather a way to stir; to free and enliven thought while remaining sufficiently anchored to a historical position to accept responsibility (Braidotti, 2006, p. 75). While grounded in poststructuralist discourse of repetition, parody, irony, multiplicity and contingency, Braidotti seeks a parody that is politically enabling. For the practice of 'as-if' to be useful, it must not be mere fetishistic representation but rather it must be rooted in deliberate agency and lived experience. A grounded subjectivity must not be lost as suggested by polemics of postmodernist ideas. On the contrary, Braidotti shows how postmodern subversions like repetition, parody and irony can be politically empowering if they are sustained by a critical consciousness and a commitment to transformation and change. (Vrasidas & Glass, 2002, p. 209)

Thus, by displacing the subject, nomadic theory opens a new space for redefining identity and political subjectivity as sites of resistance. This is an important move for minority vocations in general and for 21st century feminism in particular: 'A radical feminist postmodernist practice requires attention to be paid both to identity as a set of identifications and to political subjectivity as the quest for sites of resistance' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 22).

The power of voluntary and continuous displacements, both literal and figurative, to endow a political subjectivity of resistance is exemplified in Braidotti's own life choices. Born in Italy, raised in Australia, educated in Paris and currently living and teaching in the Netherlands, she sees the nomad as a subject who is neither country-less nor homeless, but has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. (1994, p. 22) Figurative displacement can also be seen in her commitment to a transgressive mode of thinking that constantly challenges established notions. This is exemplified in her choice of scholarship, deviating from established discourse and wandering in a fertile desert of empty spaces²⁴: 'my choice of location within the field of women's study is a reflection of my desire for nomadism, that is to say, my desire to suspend all attachment to established discourse' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 18). Through figurative and literal displacement, nomadism resists stasis by enabling a critical consciousness and a continuous transformative relocation of identity.

Such nomadic identities are *structurally* opposed to fixity. Braidotti (1994, p. 36) explains that if identity is retrospective, then to represent it we can only draw maps of places where we have already been, but no longer are. Nomadic cartographies must therefore constantly be redrafted and, as such, they are structurally opposed to fixity.

Yet despite the constant flux in a nomadic subject, his experience and knowledge are situated. It is true that by deconstructing identity, nomadic subjectivity is able to adopt a state of successive transitions, displacements and shifts, without and against an essential unity. But the nomad is not completely devoid of unity. He/she adopts 'a consistent mode of seasonal patterns of movement...repetitions, cyclical moves, rhythmical displacements' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 22). Thus by combining coherence with mobility, Braidotti offers a nonreactive,

²⁴ Braidotti talks about how the nomadic aesthetic entails a fascination with the solitude of empty spaces as sites for innovation which reinstate agency into feminism (Braidotti, 1994, p. 18).

creative and yet situated rethinking of the unity of the subject; ‘instead of following the trajectory of linear, chronological teleology, her thinking aims to be rhythmical and cyclical, thus in a certain sense situated’ (Mortensen, 2003, p. 12).

Beyond postmodernist cynicism

The nomad, then, is a transgressive subject, structurally opposed to fixity and able through the use of parody and continuous displacement to maintain a position of political resistance and agency. This agency, however, is already reconciled with postmodernist disillusionments about subjective unity, mastery and self-knowledge. Nomadic feminism redefines a feminist subjectivity that works ‘within the parameters of the postmodern predicament’ (Braidotti, 1994, p. 2). By acknowledging the arbitrary nature of language and respecting the complexity that surrounds us, yet without becoming mired in absurdity, nomadism offers a line of flight away from postmodernist cynicism and apathy. To illustrate this, I will introduce the polyglot, who is sceptical about fixed identities and yet committed to political agency.

Braidotti offers the figure of the linguistic nomad to underline the nomadic figuration. The polyglot, she suggests, counters phallogocentric and dogmatic thought by offering continuous displacements in the guise of language transitions, and thus asserts our condition as fragmented beings in a constant state of translation. As cited by Braidotti Julia Kristeva suggests that ‘the state of translation is the common condition of all thinking beings’ (1994, p. 11). The polyglot is then deeply involved in a poststructuralist deconstruction of identity.

A polyglot herself, Braidotti is ‘struck by the violence of the gesture that binds a fractured self to the performative illusion of unity, mastery, self-transparency’ (1994, p. 12). She calls for a feminist political resistance to the illusion of unity, championed by the polyglot. By dint of the robust critical distance granted him/her by a constant state of transit between languages, the polyglot is capable of ‘healthy scepticism about steady identities and mother tongues’, and thus has a privileged ‘vantage point for deconstructing identity’ (Braidotti, 1994, p. 12). Indeed, the polyglot is fully invested in a postmodernist fragmentation of the subject; and yet, he is not cynical.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. Print.

On the contrary, it is because the polyglot practices ‘a sort of gentle promiscuity with different linguistic bedrocks’ (Braidotti, 2011, p. 39) that he is committed to a political resistance against oppressive ideology. The polyglot ‘has long since relinquished any notion of linguistic or ethnic purity.’ Because he has no mother tongue, the polyglot understands and despises the tyranny of concepts such as ethnic purity, nationalism, and mother tongues. Lacan says there is no mother tongue, just father tongues. Indeed, the sanctification of national language belongs to the dogmatic world of phallogocentrism. The polyglot knows that language is merely ‘a site of symbolic exchange that links us together in a tenuous and yet workable web of mediated misunderstandings, which we call civilization’ (Braidotti, 1994, p. 13).

From where the polyglot stands, the world is made up of multiplicity, arbitrariness, and stuttering. ‘All knowledge is situated, that is to say partial; we are stuttering for words, even when we speak “fluently”’ (Braidotti, 1994, p. 14). Yet, to the polyglot this does not translate into cause for apathy but rather into political agency and resistance of despotism, repression and oppression. The polyglot is able to ‘respect the complexity, not drown in it’, thus becoming ‘an ethical entity, confronting multiplicity and yet avoiding relativism. She is the archetype of the postmodern subject; ‘struck by the maddening, fulminating insight about the arbitrariness of linguistic meanings and yet resisting the free fall into cynicism.’ By acknowledging that ‘arbitrary does not equate absurd’ (Braidotti, 1994, p. 15), the nomadic polyglot reclaims the sober political agency needed by feminism today thus offering a line of

flight beyond the cynicism engendered by postmodern fragmentation of the self, as well as by the randomness of language and our world.

Beyond linear, hierarchical and exclusionary phallogocentrism

Perhaps the intellectual impasses and political stasis in feminist theory today are at least partially caused by the movement's adoption of phallogocentric academic discourse. This type of discourse seems to display an unshakable commitment to the linear and hierarchical patterns of the canon. Braidotti suggests alternative structures for nomadic feminist thought based on the Deleuzian rhizome which counters the tree mode of the phallogocentric. In contrast with the tree (of knowledge), the rhizome is non-linear and non-hierarchical. Instead of a root, trunk, branches and leaves, a rhizome has a horizontal network with no singular root or centre. It represents multiplicity, interconnection, and diversity that counter the singularity, linearity, hierarchy and phallogocentrism of academic discourse.

Conversely, nomadic feminism offers a channel to revive poststructuralist thought, a mode of discourse which Braidotti suggests is crucial in order to counter a return to chauvinism. She shows how following the political defeat of the Left and the rise of nationalist neoconservatism, traditionalist reverence to the canon can be shaken through feminist thought.

I think feminism is one of the forums where the essence of the poststructuralist debate could be carried on: it is one of the escape routes for ideas that would otherwise have become extinct. Poststructuralism may survive by taking the nomadic route of feminism (Braidotti, 1994, p. 29).

Both poststructuralist discourse and feminist theory strive to leave behind the linear mode of thinking that most of us 'have been trained to respect and emulate' (Braidotti, 1994, p. 30); a mode of thinking which results in encouraging a dutiful and hindering repetition of canonical traditions which are colonized by masculinity. Following a long feminist tradition pioneered by Beauvoir who uncovers the fake universalism of reason and philosophical thinking, Braidotti wants feminism to break away from the revered and oppressive structures of academia and high theory.

Braidotti is concerned with establishing a feminist discourse which enables political subjectivity as a site of resistance; resistance to phallogocentrism, ethnocentrism and the positivity of difference. As such she is sceptical of the theoretical capacity and the moral/political willingness of philosophy, as an academic discipline, to act in nonhegemonic, nonexclusionary ways.

Philosophy – as a discipline of thought- is highly phallogocentric and antinomadic; it maintains a privileged bond to domination, power, and violence and consequently *requires* mechanisms of exclusion and domination as part of its standard practices. Philosophy creates itself through what it excludes as much as what it asserts. (Braidotti, 1994, p. 33)

Nomadic thinking, she proposes is by contrast a project which aims to engender a decentred subjectivity beyond the limiting normativity of phallogocentric academic discourse. While she is cautious of the cannibalistic tendencies of high theory to assimilate new ideas even if they were alien, she is confident that 'nomads can run faster and endure longer trips than most: thus they cannot be assimilated easily' (1994, p. 33)

Braidotti's denunciation of the ivory towers of academia is paralleled by a criticism of feminist utopian exiles. While she shares Seyla Benhabib's ethical commitment to the political empowerment of women, (p. 32) she is sceptical about her use of 'exile' as a suitable metaphor for a feminist subjectivity. Benhabib's exiles, 'a diaspora of an elected few', adopt an external vantage point 'beyond the city walls' to enable a framework for social critique. By contrast Braidotti calls for a 'massive abandonment of the logocentric *polis*' and prefers an active position in which instead of an exile outside the city walls, nomads put up their camps at the city gates, 'the alleged "center" of the empire', before crossing the next stretch of

desert. The nomad offers no plea for readmission. There are no possibilities for negotiating with and repairing the problems of phallogocentric regimes. For Braidotti, they are beyond repair. The nomad is a radical manifestation of this impossibility of reform; a ‘gesture of nonconfidence in the capacity of the *polis* to undo the power foundations on which it rests’ (1994, p. 32). Therefore Braidotti does not only object to the linearity and hierarchy and exclusionism of phallogocentric hegemony but also to feminist attempts to negotiate with it.

Beyond reactive dogmatic feminism

I now return to my earlier claim in the introduction to this essay, that contrary to many feminist schools, Braidotti’s nomadic feminism is compatible with our understanding of the feminine disposition²⁵ and thus presents a less rigid and reactive approach to feminism. The nomadic figuration is generous in acknowledging that *being a woman* is always there as an ontological precondition for a female subject’s existential becoming (Braidotti, 1989, p. 102). I contend that this very acknowledgment holds potential for broadening women’s identification with institutionalised feminism through its nomadic version. Such potential broad appeal has been problematized by feminist writers as a shallow commodification of feminism (Karpinski, 1999) and (Gedalof, 2000). I will get back to this later. But for now, I will try to show how by ‘nomadizing’ feminism, Braidotti offers an exit point from traditional schools of feminism, thus replacing reactive strategies and quasi phallogocentric dogmatism with affirmative and creative approaches and theoretical tools. In other words, I will attempt to argue that nomadism is structurally feminine.

Firstly, the re-examined relationship between home and woman reveals how nomadic rootlessness can be appropriated as a female metaphor. Postcolonial thinkers (Said, 2001) and psychoanalysts (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989) have tied exile to nationalism- a patriarchal notion par excellence. However, as many feminist writers have been trying to show, exile can be detached from nationalism, and reclaimed as a ‘female’ metaphor

‘There is a whole tradition of feminist interpretation, going back to Virginia Woolf, that views nationalism as male and juxtaposes it with female exile, epitomized by Woolf’s (1938, 1978) famous figure of woman as an outsider who says, “in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.” This tradition is continued by such feminist critics as Helene Cixous (1980), Luce Irigaray (1985, 1993), Caren Kaplan (1987), Julia Kristeva (1991), or Gerardine Meaney (1993), who have embraced exile for its subversive potential. Kristeva uses Greek mythology to associate the very origin of the concept of exile and foreignness with women. She interprets the stories of Io and Danaides as prototypical figures of female exiles, fleeing sexual entrapment and choosing their own bodies over their native lands...Kristeva recognizes sexual difference itself as accountable for women’s exiled condition in relation to patriarchy’. (Karpinski, 1999, p. 21)

Karpinski also shows how Helene Cixous draws a metaphor of women as exiles who are systematically excluded from history, language, and the symbolic, and economically subjugated and culturally alienated by phallogocentrism. We have also seen how Seyla Benhabib adopts the metaphor of a feminist exile as prerequisite for finding a utopian space

²⁵ The whole debate around the existence of any such essentially feminine disposition has been central to feminist discourse. In her essay on the ‘politics of ontological difference’ Braidotti transcends both essentialist conceptions of femininity and their antithesis. Perhaps this could be seen as a fifth line of flight beyond essentialist/anti-essentialist debate opened by her Nomadic Feminism. Instead, Braidotti suggests a reformulated notion of essentialism as a historical category that recognizes both social and biological factors (McNay, 2000, p. 91). This historical category, McNay suggests, recognises and affirms the totality of definitions that have been made of women, and provides the foundation for ‘a symbolic bond among women qua female sexed beings’ (Braidotti, 1989, p. 102). McNay argues that such a proposition not only transcends essentialist/antiessentialist binarism, but also configures gender identity ‘beyond the dichotomy of stasis and change unleashed by the essentialist debate’ (McNay, 2000, p. 91).

for distancing oneself from the city in order to critique the dominant order. Home then can be seen as male, while leaving home (exile, migration, nomadism) is a metaphor more closely connected with woman.

Moreover, not only is the notion that home is associated with the feminine, while mobility is seen as masculine, contested by feminists. But the relationship between woman and home has been problematized to an extent that home can be seen as enemy to woman. Linda McDowell talks about a strong criticism of the notion of home and domesticity developed in the early writings of second wave feminists.

For most women, the home is a site of social relations that are structured by power and inequality. It is the location of unpaid labour – still mainly the responsibility of women, despite the rapid rises in women’s waged employment in the last decades of the twentieth century. For too many women too, the home is a place dominated by fears of domestic violence and abuse, where women and children are the victims of male aggression. It is also less private than many commentators assume...[and] as Foucault argued so persuasively, the location of self-surveillance that ensures that even in the most private of acts the capillary structures of power in a modern state make certain that most behaviour conforms to societal norms. (McDowell, 2003, p. 15)

If until fairly recently, and still in some parts of the planet, the home was a site of exploitative patriarchal relations and the appropriation of women’s labour by men, it is only predictable that notions such as nomadism would hold such promise and appeal to women in the process of discovering the thrills of an emancipated existence. But this does not necessarily obliterate a historical relationship between women and home-making. I would suggest that the nomadic way of life is highly dependent on such a relationship. Women’s nesting instincts; their ability to use whichever resources they are presented with to make a home anywhere, can continue to be talents that make the nomadic way not only possible but also beautiful. From Bedouins to Twaregs, nomadic women have had a unique ability to carry the ‘home within’ wherever they go, making the necessary aesthetic and practical arrangements to ensure that time spent at any home, no matter how temporary, can be enjoyed by themselves and the people in their lives. Figuratively too, one might suggest that a uniquely feminine reserve of spirituality enables women to reinvent their identities, transform their lives, and relocate their subjectivity without losing themselves; always relying on their inner ability to ‘make a home’ out of new identities, subjectivities, places and situations. Through such an appropriation of nomadism as an innately feminine figuration, I suggest, the schism between laywomen and feminism may be bridged.

Lastly, nomadism offers a gentle approach to change which acknowledges and respects the difference between *will* and *desire*, thus permitting women the time and freedom of expression necessary to achieve an internalized denunciation of subjugating patterns rather than an ideologically imposed one. It can be argued that the historical necessity for a reactive, combative, critical and doctrinaire feminism is over, following the political and legislative achievements of the movement. The continuation of such a tradition has led institutionalized feminism to a crisis of legitimation which must be overcome by new theoretical styles as we have seen. By insisting on a patient, broad-minded, affirmative, non-reactive and creative approach, Braidotti formulates a feminism that acknowledges the difference between wilful political choices and unconscious desires. For example, her openness to multiplicity and creative role playing through the practice of “as-if” (in contrast with dogmatic restrictive feminism) permit a non-reactive, non-defensive approach to emancipated womanhood which allows for responsible but free manifestations of desires through a politically conscious practice of parody. This way, women can ‘play’ women if it so addresses their desires, as long as they are politically conscious of the performative aspects of their gender play, of where it comes from, and where it could lead. Thus nomadism allows women the space and

time they need to change oppressive patterns at a deep, unconscious level, rather than at a superficial and ultimately unsustainable conceptual level.

Braidotti (1994, p. 31) recognizes that we have internalized phallogocentric structures so much that transformation will inevitably be a painful process. I think feminism has too often been dismissed as a project which denies women the freedom to express the ways of their gender as they have learnt them. By calling for an immediate displacement of women outside their traditional gender roles on ideological grounds, feminism attempted a shortcut which compromised its ability to achieve its cultural objectives on a wide scale. This attempt to impose will on desire is seen by Braidotti as a dangerous shortcut: ‘One cannot take shortcuts through one’s unconscious; the women who attempt to cheat their way across – especially female feminists- are playing with fire... inner, psychic or unconscious structures are very hard to change by sheer volition.’ (Braidotti, 1994, p. 31)

Nomadism’s contribution in this regard is paramount. By understanding and respecting the difficulties entailed in inventing and accepting new performative gender roles, it urges us to find new creative, nonreactive and affirmative ways of asserting sexual difference as a positive force ‘emancipated from the oppressive force of the traditional theoretical approach’ (p. 31). Braidotti stresses that this must be a slow process that allows for ‘internal contradictions and attempts to negotiate between unconscious structures of desire and conscious political choices.’

Conclusion

I have argued so far that Nomadic theory offers an alternative figuration which has the potential to open exit lines from some of the impasses of post-second-wave-feminism. In this last line-of-flight, I made a perhaps contentious claim that such potential is related to nomadic feminism’s collusion with existing notions of femininity. Some of the examples I referred to were nomadic feminism’s receptiveness of diverse ways in which women express emancipated womanhood (typical of third wave feminism). I also tried to claim that nomadic subjectivity allows women to flee the oppressive home while embracing their feminine home-making instincts. I concluded by contending that nomadic feminism’s gentle acknowledgment of the time necessary to change internalized notions of femininity (or feminine disposition) is key to its appeal to women at a broader scale.

As exciting as such propositions are to women who believe in feminist ideals but do not necessarily identify themselves as feminists, Braidotti’s nomadic figuration has not gone uncontested by feminists. One of the most common angles from which her theory has been criticized is the idea that nomadism is a fitting metaphor only for those with privilege; White Western middle-class feminists (Karpinski, 1999) and (Gedalof, 2000).

Karpinski for example views Braidotti’s treatment of exile and nomadism as an illustration of ‘the dangers of postmodernist feminism unrestrained by moral and ethical concerns’ (Karpinski, 1999, pp. 21-24). She finds her figuration ‘cannibalistic’ in the sense that it romanticizes tragic positions of women (nomads, homeless, disabled)²⁶ and accuses her of speaking ‘from the site of white, middle-class privilege, forgetting that those multilingual voices... often negotiate their languages from the position of powerlessness’ (Karpinski, 1999, p. 24). Similarly, Gedalof finds nomadism to be an option only for western middle-class women. She is concerned that for black, diasporic, postcolonial and other less privileged feminists, this option is not really available (Gedalof, 2000, p. 344).

Karpinski is also uncomfortable with the amount of appeal nomadic feminism may hold for women. She finds it ‘troubling’ that Braidotti’s ‘eclectic feminism can be constructed

²⁶ Karpinski seems to have overlooked Braidotti’s keen differentiation between the nomad (as a constant traveller by choice and vocation), and the exile or the migrant. In fact, Braidotti herself is not quite comfortable with Woolf’s position on women’s countrylessness and the whole romanticization of the notion of exile and the right to belong which are ‘too serious merely to be metaphorised into a new ideal (Braidotti, 1994, p. 22).

as a new commodity to be sold to women, one more product promising self-transformation and self-fulfilment, marketed as ‘an object of desire for women’ (Karpinski, 1999, p. 24).

While it is true that nomadism may be both middle-class-centric and marketable, I don’t see why the rootedness of nomadic feminism in a Western middle-class perspective and its potential for broad appeal, would necessarily restrict its ability to advance feminist ideals and instigate real and universal political change. It is true that developing a figuration is only the first step. But it is an important first step whose substance can only indeed be determined by the extent to which it is translatable into political transformation. Linda McDowell (2003, p. 28) eloquently calls for a commitment to transform the optimism that informs such notions into political agendas that address the continued subjugation of women, people of colour and the poor. She urges feminist theorists ‘not to neglect the structural processes of inequality that characterize capitalist societies and that continue to divide the interests of people along class, gender and ethnic lines’ (McDowell, 2003, p. 28).

Karpinski herself recognizes that ‘the mode of being an exile enables new ways of knowing the world.’ And that ‘it might be a formula characterizing any social movement, *provided* [emphasis mine] that the next step would lead to the mode of acting.’ (Karpinski, 1999, p. 24)

While arguably Eurocentric, Braidotti’s nomadic figuration has fascinating potential not only for an enriching personal transformation for thousands of women around the world, but also for a political impact beyond the centre of the feminist movement. With new technologies that compress distance and the opportunities they present for virtual communities of interest, a new international politics of coalition is possible. Such a coalition based on a collective passion for nomadic subjectivity could not only raise key question for feminist scholars in the metropolises of the industrial West, but also open possibilities; lines of flight, for a continued progressive transformation in the every-day lives of women around the world.

References:

- Ahmed, S. (1998). *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Braidotti, R. (1989). *The Politics of Ontological Difference*. London: Routledge.
- Braidotti, R. (1994). *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*. New York: Columbia U.P.
- Braidotti, R. (2003). Feminist Philosophies. In M. Eagleton, *Feminist Theory* (pp. 195-214). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Braidotti, R. (2006). *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1988). *A Thousand Plateaus*. London: Anthlone Press LTD.
- Faludi, S. (2006). *Backlash: the undeclared war against American women* . New York : Three Rivers Press .
- Gedalof, I. (2000). Identity in Transit: Nomads, Cyborgs and Women, . *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 7, 3, , 337-354.
- Grinberg, R., & Grinberg, L. (1989). *Psychoanalytic Perspectives on Migration and Exile*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kaminer, W. (1993, October 1). *Feminism's Identity Crisis*. Retrieved April 28, 2013, from The Atlantic: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1993/10/feminisms-identity-crisis/304921/>
- Karpinski, E. C. (1999). Development of a Transnational Feminist Consciousness . In A. Heitlinger, *Émigré Feminism: Transnational Perspectives* (pp. 17-30). Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated.
- Lerner, J. (n.d.). *Lines of Flight*. Retrieved May 5 , 2013, from Josh Lerner: <http://www.linesofflight.net/linesofflight.htm>

- Levit, N. (1998). *The Gender Line*. New York: New York University press.
- McDowell, L. (2003). Place and Space. In M. Eagleton, *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory* (pp. 11-31). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- McNay, L. (2000). *Gender and Agency*. Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishing.
- Mortensen, E. (2003). *Touching Thought: Ontology and Sexual Difference* . Oxford : Lexington Books.
- Said, E. (2001). *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vrasidas, C., & Glass, G. V. (2002). *Distance education and distributed learning*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Pub.