OF BIRDS AND TREES:
RETHINKING DECOLONIALITY THROUGH UNSETTLEMENT AS A PLURIVERSAL HUMAN CONDITION

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Abstract - Unsettlement is our current shared pluriversal human condition. We experience it differently depending on our trajectories, privileges and disadvantages. What we all share is the sense of ultimate defuturing. The negative phase of globalization coming to its apex, threatens to fold the world into a digital slavery in which coloniality would finally stop to be seen as a *problem* of refugees, migrants and indigenous people or a fashionable term of the academic elite, to be faced directly by each and every. The Covid-19 crisis has acted as an epitome of this tendency. Previously decoloniality has focused mainly on the critique of the intersections of race and capitalism in the production of knowledge and subjectivities, with a clear focus on the past. It has seldom addressed the future or ventured outside the position of the colonial difference (exteriority). In the face of the global challenges such as defunct politics and the ultra-right populist turn, the Anthropocene and technological colonization, the ongoing fragmenting of the human species, coloniality needs to be complemented with additional dimensions that would allow overcoming its stand-pointism and potentially unproductive refusal to dialogue across the imperial difference with other critical positions. One of such dimensions is unsettlement which is discussed in the article as a promising concept in the agenda for refuturing. It aims at transcending academic thinking to go in the direction of agency and bottom-up activism (political, social and artistic). In the last decade unsettlement has turned into a leitmotif of life in crisis per se manifested on the ontological, existential, affective and material levels of increasingly precarious lives of even those who seemingly stay in place thus bursting the modern/colonial binary of a rooted citizen versus an unsettled outlaw. With the Covid-19 crisis we have all become unsettled and brought to face the crisis of legitimacy of evacuated politics, of the nation-state, of international unions, institutions and bodies that have nothing to offer except a looming permanent state of exception and *farmacopornographic* control. Can the pluriversal unsettlement generate new transversal relational solidarity beyond the bankrupt institutions and power structures? Can it launch new communities of change which would inevitably also change us as humans? How would art and fiction react to these tectonic shifts and advance the shaping of the agendas of these communities of change? The article briefly addresses two possible paths for artistic representations of the unsettlement – the introspective one struggling with multiple identifications and re-weaving oneself and one's world anew (exemplified by Hayv Kahraman's works), and a less realized though promising way of the positive ontological design fictions and utopias/dystopias transcending modernity/coloniality to imagine an alternative other world (as manifested in a recent *Mundos Alternos: Art and Science Fiction in the Americas* exhibition). The unsettled *birds* rather than rooted *trees* are likely to be the main protagonists of these fictions and of the communities of change, helping us to learn that unsettlement can eventually bring a positive sense of the self and/in the world and a new political imagination to refuturing.

Keywords: unsettlement; pluriversality; defuturing**;** decoloniality; coalitions.

1. Prologue

My credo is to be a bird, not a tree. And it is not just a metaphor. I grew up in the North Caucasus in the 1970s when the stagnant state socialism had almost erased the local indigenous languages and cosmologies persistently eradicated in the course of the Russian and Soviet colonization. By the 1970s my people – the Circassians, as we are called in the rest of the world (or Adyghe as we call ourselves) (Natho 2009) had become aliens in our own indigenous homeland, unsettled and resettled by imperial Russian/Soviet authorities countless times to make it impossible for us to reconnect with sacred ancestral places, memories, ghosts and histories. The unhealed "colonial wound" (Anzaldúa 1999, p. 25) of my people was a wound of a more than a century of a bloody colonial war, ethnic cleansings, induced epidemics and famine, and finally a genocide and violent deportation from the native land. And yet we – the disenfranchised and forever intimidated unwanted indigenous population, the prodigy of the small fraction of the

genocide survivors, driven up into the reservations and later Soviet small towns and villages, were and are considered rather lucky for we were at least allowed to stay in the Caucasus. The majority of deported Circassians that ended up in the refugee camps in the Ottoman Sultanate where most of them perished, and later spread all over the Middle East, lost not only their property, culture, identity, and language, but also the homeland in the most palpable physical sense. Hence their longing to feel one with the life-giving Caucasus, to quench one's thirst from the ancestral creek and pick a fruit from a hybrid tree in the ancient cherished Circassian forest garden.

The tree is an extremely rooted symbol, earthbound and far from the avian freedom and flight. According to the meta-code of the human-tree the stronger and deeper one's ancestral roots, the more durable one is as a person. Many peoples of the Caucasus look for existential grounds in the Nart heroic epic, in tribal meetings, in ethnic-cultural and gender prescriptions (Kuchukova 2005). Yet all of these props tie one to the earth – in a territorial and psychological sense, they create a complex of the short leash of the sacred geography. While a bird is a winged being free from any regional component.

Yet one of the main gods of Circassian pantheon is Souzeredzh – the god of bounty and the patron of the sea travellers as my ancestors were also skillful seafarers surfing in their swift boats – *kamaras* – far from being always firmly attached to the ground. Rather a rootedness and a rigid attachment to the Caucasus could be an indirect result of the extended Russian colonization taking off plot by plot the Circassian lands, making people survive in the alien environments with no rights to leave, and forcing them to forget their previous more cosmopolitan and restless nature. What is important is to see the birds and the trees not separately but as a relation.

The Circassian forest garden is also a good example of relationality as it merges the human-grown garden and the wilderness, to make a wild forest an earthly paradise welcoming any traveller, any bird that needs to rest. Circassian trajectory as a result of the Russian annexation and the subsequent genocide and destruction of any material traces of our civilization such as the forest gardens as the epitome of the old Circassian ecological balance, is a destiny of unsettlement, uprooting and turning into homeless birds that have nowhere to land (Daurov 2011).

The bird is a winged creature but it needs trees to rest and nest. And what if it never rests or does not nest? What comes to mind is a disturbing image of the bird with no feet. There are many variations of this metaphor, the most famous being Tennessee Williams's play *Orpheus Descending* (1957). But I much prefer Audre Lorde's version: "Wherever the bird with no feet flew, she found trees with no limbs" (Lorde 1983, p. 31). However, the Circassian trees are not just branchless. They are irrevocable as the forests, including the unique forest gardens, are long cut down as an effective Russian strategy to prevent us from hiding in the forests that gave Circassians food, shelter and spiritual support. As a result of colonization those of us who stayed in the role of subalterns, and those who were exiled because they refused to obey, equally became unsettled, forever stuck between the violent past and the possibly no less violent future.

The feetless bird and branchless trees have haunted me for several decades as a fitting expression of my own sensibility of having no roots and opting for a voluntary if not a happy non-belonging. This sensibility is not just my personal existential trait. Rather it is a long going trace of coloniality which has left me with no access to my culture and language, an alien in my own land, and among my own people. It is my individual version of our collective Circassian *imperial duress* (Stoler 2016) – an unquenchable angst for an *other* being with a more harmonious in-tune-ness with one's land, memory, human and other living beings.

2. Rethinking the decolonial option

"Coloniality" is a term that was coined by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (Quijano 1992) at the moment of the collapse of the state socialist system and discrediting of its accompanying utopia, and the arrival of neoliberal globalization and the *end of history* (Fukuyama 1992) narrative. Coloniality is in many ways a reflection of disillusionment and transference of decolonization rhetoric from real politics to more imaginary and immaterial spheres such as knowledge production and aesthetics. It was "a response from the underside to the enforced homogeneity of neoliberal modernity and to the realization that the state cannot be democratized or decolonized" (Walsh and Mignolo 2018, p. 106).

Although I still find decolonial optics one of the most accurate in the interpretation of modernity including the contemporary forms of global coloniality I believe that this optic requires some nuancing and additional angles in the face of the global crises in their short-term (Covid-19) and long-term (climate change) manifestations. Moreover, the crises themselves can potentially help in advancing the decolonial agenda in the directions that have not been considered before. My critique is not a negative one but rather an effort to bring decolonial thinking more in tune with the current global developments and challenges. One of these challenges and signs of our times is undoubtedly that of unsettlement. Before I turn to unsettlement as a pluriversal human condition that can act as both a negative and positive tool of ontological designing, I would like to address the potential further development areas and pitfalls of decolonial thinking.

The concept of coloniality has predominantly focused on the intersections of race and capitalism in the production of knowledge and subjectivities remaining unaware when it was first formulated of such global tendencies as the climate change, chronophobia, defuturing, and unsettlement. Today coloniality means essentially the same yet it needs to be thought over in a more direct and thorough relation to the on-going crises. The Covid-19 crisis makes it urgent to rethink decoloniality and complement it with additional vectors taking into account the current tendencies.

Decolonial thought is most acute in its critical interpretation of the past and its effects on the present, yet this critique is often balancing at the edge of stand-pointism (limited to the position of *exteriority* or colonial difference) which divides the humanity in a potentially essentialist way and defutures the human species closing any possibilities for communal refuturing action. These tendencies in decolonial thinking are becoming counterproductive in the contemporary situation when we need to realize that our survival as a species as well as other species and the Earth itself depends on relational collaborative action which cannot be limited to only decolonial agency and subjectivity.

Disturbingly the ultra-right rhetoric has globally hijacked the decolonial reading of the past as its core agenda, to apply it in a dangerous reanimation of ethnic-cultural, religious, Eurocentric, nationalist and other mythologies normalizing rootedness and othering non-belonging. The fixation on the (resurrection and reclaiming of the) past often prevents decoloniality from imagining the future and from detecting the tectonic shifts the world is rapidly going through. A mere restating of coloniality as an immutable sign of modernity in the 16th century or now is becoming more and more problematic, and not just because of its proneness to sweeping generalizations. A lack of sufficient attention to the newly emerging challenges or their dismissing leads to increasing out-datedness of decolonial thought. One of such challenges is the changing human ontology, not least through the massive technological colonization. Extending the decolonial critique to the present and the future in more substantially investigated forms is necessary also because it would bring forward decolonial agency and bottom-up activism (political, social, artistic) rather than merely academic bubble thinking.

Denouncing Eurocentrism decolonial thought tends to still paradoxically reproduce it not so much content-wise but discursively, in the binary mode of thinking, marked by human/nature division and objectification of nature, in temporal structures that problematizing linearity still reproduce the progressivist historical scheme (albeit with a focus on the past). In recent decolonial texts the anthropocentric notions are more balanced with the inclusion of nature and even life as such into the sphere of exteriority. Yet the construction of arguments remains surprisingly Euromodern. Partly this is due to the academic and disciplinary writing requirements which remain logocentric. This is also why non-academic decolonial writing and art with their polysemantic metaphors and complex and non-straightforward semiotic nodes are more successful in capturing decolonial sensibility than any academic text.

It is also important to rethink radical decolonial *delinking* as with the rapid enfolding of the global crisis continuing to hide within the narrow experience of one's victimhood and struggle for representation, as well as envisioning a model beyond modernity exclusively from the exteriority of colonial difference – are increasingly out of sync with reality. That other world that is possible and that decolonialists have been proclaiming for the last two and a half decades cannot stay an imaginary world forever. It requires some practical steps for its realization or at least a discussion of such steps on our part. However, decolonial thought in its most well-known academic version seldom goes far and deep enough to imagine and design such practical changes.

Hiding behind the general post-constructivist approach to any claims for truth, decolonial thinkers de facto refuse to take part in real changes not for the sake of a hypothetical truth of the historical past but for the sake of real lives – human and other. In this sense Arturo Escobar's and Tony Fry's efforts to launch projects for the creation of *change communities* of redirective action and *autonomous design* (Escobar 2017) empowering the local communities to bring into being a redirected future under their own control – are more viable ways for decoloniality (Fry and Tlostanova, forthcoming) without falling into the fallacy of either locking oneself up in imagined indigeneity or confining to the ivory academic tower. Such understanding of the communities of change incorporates very different actors, from the global North and South, scholars, designers, activists, local communities and artists.

I am reflecting on these issues not for the sake of critiquing decoloniality but rather because I see an urgent need to pour some fresh blood into decolonial thinking before it hardens in its own self-reference. I find it urgent to open it up for other critical schools and approaches both from the North, from the South and from various semi-peripheral spaces, to launch coalitions and alliances not only in the pure discursive space but also in agency. One of such concepts binding with other forms of critical thinking is the concept of unsettlement. It can act as a tool helping to bring decolonial perspective back to the larger world to put it in functional dialogue with other critical positions.

3. Unsettlement – physical and spiritual

Negotiating between belonging and non-belonging, rootedness and displacement, is one of the core conceptualizations of the global crisis. Metaphorically we can imagine it as an opposition of the trees and birds mentioned above. In the last decade this sensibility has acquired additional overtones. Unsettlement has turned into a leitmotif of life in crisis per se manifested on the ontological, existential, affective and material levels (the climate change, wars and catastrophes induced massive migration but also the unsettlement of increasingly precarious lives of even those who seemingly stay in place and do not migrate). The Covid-19 crisis has enormously accelerated and intensified this tendency leaving most of us feeling unsafe and unhomed

(Bhabha 1994, p. 9) in the most ordinary and previously secure situations in the family, in our homes, in the streets of our cities, among our friends.

The turning of unsettlement into a major leitmotif has intensified in the recent decades eroding borders of the nation states and creating an illusion of the boundless world for certain privileged groups until quite recently, but bringing only endless fences and barbed wire for others. The malevolent context of the increased unsettlement includes the post-peace and post-democratic contexts, commercialization of all spheres of life and its dispensability, the fear to realize the movement of time and the finiteness and fragility of the kind of existence we built for ourselves and other species and, as result, an inability to imagine a different world and start working for its implementation. It is largely a lacking understanding of interconnectedness of all aspects of the major crisis we inhabit which is already altering our nature as humans, a fitful grasping of isolated elements of being by our inept derelational thinking without being able to relate them dynamically and pluriversally. One example is technological coloniality which is often presented as a way of salvation whereas in reality technologies are the key agents in altering human ontology and the disease mistakenly prescribed as the cure.

Pluriversality is understood here in decolonial terms as maintaining a coexistence and correlation of many different interacting and intersecting positions with equal rights to existence. As a concept pluriversality is linked with pluralism that recognises multiple perspectives displacing the notion of one world (Lewis 1986). Pluriversality as a universal principle goes hand in hand with relationality or, in Amerindian terms, "vincularidad – an awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organisms with territory or land and the cosmos" (Walsh and Mignolo 2018, p. 1). Another example is animism freed from Eurocentric condescending interpretations and seen as "understanding relatedness from a related point of view, within the shifting horizons of the related viewer" and seeing environment as "nested relatedness" (Bird-David 1999, pp. 77-78).

The global human condition of displacement shatters any primordialist interpretations of belonging. Armenian writer Agasi Aivazyan questions this constrained cosmopolitanism of the poor stating in his fantastic novel *American Adzhabsandal* that the Armenian *tnank*, the English *homeless*, the French *clochard*, the Russian *bomzh* and the Oriental *avara* have completely different human conditions and their lack of home does not equal a lack of motherland. "It is not bad to be a homeless if you are homeless in Paris", – a French clochard Jean says. "I can be homeless as long as I am homeless in Armenia" – agrees the main character, marked by a specific Armenian Diasporic angst (Aivazyan 2001).

Unsettlement is indeed a current common pluriversal human condition which we experience differently depending on our trajectories, privileges and disadvantages yet all share as a leitmotif of ultimate defuturing for we tend to still link the feeling of safety with belonging to some space, community, land, group thinking. Until recently the public culture, politics, mass media tended to regard unsettlement as a limited problem of various outcasts that can be easily solved through effective management. The leading mood remained that of the chronophobic status quo refusing to face the unsustainability of the current dominant *Capitalocene* (Haraway 2016) life style with its endless race for growth and *progress* for the sake of consuming more and more. The negative phase of globalization coming to its apex as a result of the Covid-19 crisis, threatens to fold the world into a digital slavery mode where coloniality would finally stop to be seen as a *problem* of refugees**,** migrants and indigenous people or a fashionable term of the academic elite, to confront directly each and every.

Unsettlement is a fitting concept with multiple interpretations connecting the material level of the imminent global movement of people, cities, businesses in the coming decades, due to the climate change, unsustainable economies, geopolitical conflicts and wars, but also, importantly, the existential effects of this resettlement of peoples leaving them/us with no sense of the future.

> Unsettlement names a moment in human existence that recognises an ending without any clear sense of what is beginning. Along with this goes a certain feeling of foreboding that what will arrive and will be unwelcome. As such, life is lived in ever-expanding conditions of uncertainty. The slow existential realization of this situation heralds the coming "age of unsettlement". Confronting this age extends from seeing it enfolding the present "state of the world" to it being lived as condition directed by, and experienced as, a "state of mind" – a psychology. For the geo-physical and psycho-socially unsettled masses of lived unsettlement the past is memory occupied by a pain of loss and a procession of all that was once experienced and treasured. As for the present it is lived as a non-life, while the future is merely a void filled with a daily mix of faint hope and despair (Fry and Tlostanova, forthcoming).

This is a typical sensibility of a refugee subjected to a strange temporal war – waiting for his fate to be decided, taken out of the flow of life, sometimes for years on end, when the actual term of his life on earth is stolen and he can never be sure that he would not be finally deported back to the hell from which he attempted to escape. Until recently it was precisely the refugees (and previously the *terrorists*) that acted as the most obvious signs of disaster (Gordon and Gordon 2010) exempt from any political action or space, robbed of time, and functioning not as agents of their own empowerment, but only as emblems of their own suffering and at times aggression and threat, or/and Fanonian *phobogenic* subjects, who stand below the symbolic which makes them "invisible beyond perverse anonymous objects", "the meaning-content of the dream – the phobogenic reality" (Gordon, 1996, p. 80). They literally embody the fears of Western modernity and are to be conveniently tucked away somewhere as they are naturally visible and at the same time, publicly invisible (Borren 2008, p. 214), exempt from any political action, any political space or the space of appearance (Arendt 1958, pp. 198-199). Today this human condition threatens to become all-embracing. Before the Covid-19 crisis catastrophic capitalism has already re-naturalized the war ethics justifying our collective permanent loss of freedoms under the excuse of fighting the consequences of various catastrophes – natural, geopolitical, and technological. The normalization of the state of exception often induced by the dual state has already started "turning every citizen into a potential threat needing to be monitored" (Galič, Timan, Koops 2017, p. 9) much before Covid-19.

Unsettlement has many shades. The situation with climate or water refugees is a bit different from the more familiar geopolitical and clearly military conflicts as causes of mass migration in the recent past. This is geopolitics of mere survival. The grim reality of forever barren territories useless for habitation and agriculture, of vast and previously densely populated plains flooded by the rising ocean has no use for political casuistic to define the degree of democracy in different regimes. Instead it magnifies the situation of survival as such unconnected to political preferences, at least in any straightforward way. This kind of unsettlement downsizes and humbles the humanity to its more realistic dimension and accentuates both the new forms of inequality and the new ways to solidarity which are difficult to implement.

Covid-19 crisis has acted as the epitome of these tendencies erasing the boundary between the old and new wretched of the earth and those who had an illusion of being relatively safe and having some kind of future. Diasporic, exiled, migrant, stateless and nomadic people as well as internal others living in ghettoes, townships and reservations have existed for millennia but what is collapsing right now is the modern/colonial normalization of the properly rooted citizen as opposed to the unsettled outlaw. One does not even have to travel or be a migrant to become unsettled and dehumanized. It is enough to be confined in your own apartment as a futureless prison with no way out or find out you are Covid-positive and therefore a new outcast. We have all become unsettled overnight as we were brought to face the crisis of legitimacy of evacuated politics, the nation-state, international unions, institutions and bodies that have nothing to offer but a permanent state of exception and a corona-virus capitalism (Klein 2020).

The prevailing helpless and constrained sensibility is what we were all made to share through the Covid-19 crisis. Yet, the fact that the *virus does not discriminate* based on nationality, race or religion (Stiglitz 2020), has not resulted so far on any considerable scale, in any palpable community of sense or a conscious will to create a new global (comm)unity in response to the Covid-19 crisis. Reflecting on the *communovirus*, Jean Luc Nancy claims that we are yet unable to even imagine such a community: "The problem is that the virus is still its main representative; that between the surveillance model and the welfare model, only the virus remains as the common property" (Nancy 2020).

In some way the Covid-19 crisis is also a form of suspended future. However, the reasons for this getting stuck in the never-land are different from both the situation of the end-of-history eternal status quo consumerism of the present whose unsustainability we have refused to acknowledge, and from the helpless void of refugees and illegalized migrants whose future is clearly "mortgaged" (Fanon 1963, p. 22). It is partly explained by the inexplicability of Covid-19 which is equally invisible and inconspicuous as the climate change but acts many times faster and lacks a clear teleology. It is hard to blame someone concrete and specific for the Covid-19 disaster (although there are many examples of such efforts – from various conspiracy theories to explaining the situation in more general terms through the Anthropocene) (Fry and Tlostanova 2020). The uncertain but clearly rather distant future of the planetary catastrophe has suddenly been brought close to us all putting the humanity into the conditions of fast and grim realization of futurelessness.

In this sense it is not even or not only the Covid-19 itself that we increasingly fear but more so the world we are entering after the crisis is over. It is the world in which unsettlement will become the key sensibility for nearly everyone, a negative community of sense, of feeling unhomed in your own body. Ironically, locked immobile in our apartments, houses, cells, barracks, diligently *staying home* we quickly found ourselves with no ground underfoot and with no hope to find this ground in any foreseeable future. Paul Preciado reflects on this peculiar effect of taking the sovereignty away and stripping us all to our bodies regarded as a source of danger, and managing us through a strange form of *farmacopornographic* control:

> The new necropolitical frontier has shifted from the coast of Greece toward the door of your home. Lesbos now starts at your doorstep. And the border is forever tightening around you, pushing you ever closer to your body. Calais blows up in your face. The new frontier is the mask. The air that you breathe has to be yours alone. The new frontier is your epidermis. The new Lampedusa is your skin. For years, we considered migrants and refugees infectious to the community and placed them in detention centers – political limbos where they remained without rights and without citizenship; perpetual waiting rooms. Now we are living in detention centers in our own homes (Preciado 2020a).

The point is not just that we will not be able to travel, meet with friends, or hug our loved ones. The point really is that these seemingly harmless restrictions if they go for a sufficient time will clearly affect our basic anthropic biosocial and psychosocial parameters, affects, emotional structures, ways of communication and proximity to the world and other humans. The necessity of revising these basic ontological features of our humanness would no doubt intensify and accelerate the already started changes as we are becoming a fractured, fragmenting species with a changing ontological *nature* (Fry 2019). This refers not only to the obvious increase in inequality and different proximity to the redefined anthropic principle, but now, due to the Covid-19 crisis, to the more negatively equalized forced rejection of a previously crucial part of our shared human nature – as the sense of physical, almost animal safety that we associate among other things with our familiar environments and people is being fundamentally shaken by the Covid-19 crisis. The treachery of the physical world which would seem to stay deadly at least for an indefinite time, the frozen catastrophic (rather than previous consumerist) temporality, the taken away sense of unity with the world and with other people

– are not yet broadly discussed or fully realized. But their significance will increase together with the realization that any return to the previous normal is impossible – for not just economic or political reasons, but also corpo-material. Then we will be all confronted with the disturbing question that Paul B. Preciado asked in the first weeks of the Covid-19 crisis:

> From now on, we would have access to ever more excessive forms of digital consumption, but our bodies, our physical organisms, would be deprived of all contact and of all vitality. The mutation would manifest as a crystallization of organic life, as a digitization of work and consumption and as a dematerialization of desire.
> The first thing I did … was to ask myself this question: Under what conditions and in which way would life be worth living? (Preciado 2020b).

For me this is perhaps the main question today and the existential root of the present phase of unsettlement. Consequently, imagining new ways of making sense of our lives after the Covid-19 crisis and in the context of the evolving larger and more complex imminent crises in the near and distant future seems to be the main challenge.

Covid-19 crisis has acted as the mysterious Godot in Becket's play inducing the same sense of being nailed to a limited space and immersed in a viscous still time through the trope of pointless and endless waiting for a miraculous shift of the world back to *order*. In his later plays the motif of immobility would be intensified in the disturbing scenes of characters confined to garbage cans or sinking gradually underground. Paradoxically this immobility and forcible rootedness are the epitomes of unsettlement, more existential in Becket's case and equally biophysical in our case. Covid-19 crisis has made it palpable that we have entered an endgame but a strange one that can continue and stay suspended for a long time. It is easier for our minds to make sense of the world and ourselves through some recognizable myth, a narrative with clear good and evil characters, and a no less clear moral maxim in the end. But the simple narratives of good conquering the evil or glorification of hard work and self-sacrifice are no longer valid and we have to try to find the ways out, invent an alternative lexicon and teleology without appealing to these familiar means.

Being a bird (free or caged) is not necessarily always a positive and joyful human condition. Rather in the new semiosis of unsettlement being a bird is a sign of extreme vulnerability-as-freedom including the freedom from material belongings and corporeal and affective connections. In this sense we are becoming feetless birds finding no tree to land and no home where to sing our song.

4. The forking paths

In the situation of normalized unsettlement and ultimate defuturing an open question is what kind of *community of sense* (Rancière 2009) will be born out of this condition? Would it potentially lead to a new solidarity and empowerment of local communities and the eventual birth of a new political imagination? Should we try to reinstate the old normality that has created the crisis, to succumb to the new normality imposed by the nation states, international organizations and political institutions, extending the endgame impasse and confinement for an indefinite time, or focus on other ways of re-existence and networks of resources for building the communities of change?

The first two options can be defined as negative ontological designs (Fry 2017; Tlostanova 2017). The third one is yet a subjunctive modality of a new political imagination and agency. This does not mean that we will try to restore the human-sized and human-centered world. Rather it means that we would try to use our human abilities including critical thinking and technologies as well as relational practices grounded in a realization of our unity with the

world, for advancing the sense of responsibility and efforts to save the life on our planet in all its forms, and cooperate rather than compete to survive. For that we need to stop seeing ourselves as victims negotiating a better affirmative action or masters oblivious to anything outside our own lifespans to become nurturers of "re-existence" as a "redefinition and re-signification of life in conditions of dignity, a praxis of the otherwise" (Walsh and Mignolo, p. 18) and initiators of *deep coalitions*. Deep coalitions were theorized by decolonial feminist Maria Lugones as solidarities that never reduce multiplicity. They span across differences. "Aware of particular configurations of oppression, they are not fixed on them, but strive beyond into the world, towards a shared struggle of interrelated others" (Lugones 2003, p. 98). This is a task we are collectively confronted with no matter which side of modernity/coloniality we inhabit.

This task cannot be confined to the position of the colonial difference on which much of decolonial thought it still grounded. It must necessarily include the imperial differential as well as other post-dependence human conditions and sensibilities forming the future positive ontological design balancing between the comfortable delusions and eschatological recklessness and engaging in a complex relational critical reflection on the world. Yet, even with the Covid-19 emergency situation in mind it would be naïve to assume that the political will, economic structures and epistemic tenets will be changed soon, that we will be able to shift to "not only political responsibility but also a peculiarly political form of love" (Gordon 2018) for the lives of those who remain anonymous to us, or perhaps beyond our understanding, and for the tentative and precarious future of life as such.

The question is if our pluriversal unsettlement can indeed generate new transversal relational solidarity beyond the bankrupt institutions and power structures, if it can launch new communities of change which would also change us as humans. Art and fiction seem to be more nuanced and immediate in their reaction to these shifts.

5. Fictions of unsettlement

Unsettlement on many levels and in many manifestations has been for some time a central trope of postcolonial, decolonial, diasporic, and immigrant art, problematizing modernity/coloniality. The most well-known examples negotiate the loneliness of a subject forced to become a modern individual and having lost its links with the community, with efforts to make sense of the phantom pains of erased histories, communal cosmologies and ethics, and forgotten languages. They often focus on introspection, struggle with shifting, changeable, situational, and contextually bound multiple identifications. One example is Hayv Kahraman whose trajectory reproduces one of the major modern/colonial lines – the experience of a refugee (from Iraq to Sweden), the immigrant life in the US, and a gradually cultivated sense of non-belonging and unsettlement as an inescapable human and artistic condition (Hayv Kahraman 2020).

Corporeal, affective reaction to uprooting as the main leitmotif of migration and exile is central for Kahraman's artistic universe where coloniality acts in its most extreme form of denying human dignity and the right to be oneself for the sake of mere survival. She problematizes performativity, visuality and the mechanisms of perception through shredding, puncturing and weaving and mending as a complex act of *re-existence* (Alban 2009). This allows the negated forms of relating to the world, reemerge and trigger her decolonial sensual response of building an identity and a life anew, regaining her agency and dignity, and designing a whole world out of the pieces of shredded canvases. Kahraman's working with shredding, puncturing and weaving is a form of transference that helps to survive, channeling destructive impulses into healing regenerative routes. Accentuating the empowering act of weaving as ontological designing, Kahraman draws attention to the creolized nature of migrant

and translated identities, cultural and art forms, and multilayered memories. As in E. Glissant's metaphor, the artist "focuses on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components" (Glissant 1997, p. 190). Out of the recurrent weaving pattern Kahraman has created a separate art form which could be called "me-tissage" (Lionnet 1989, p. 29). The weaving metaphor materializes in a corporeal form: a metisage as a form of tissage (from *tissé*, to weave). But *metisage* is also an inherently relational poetics, "non-linear, non-prophetic and woven from arduous patience and incomprehensible detours" (Glissant 1981, p. 251). Kahraman's *alter ego* is such a *mé-tisse* – a hybrid woman with a Middle Eastern face and a Renaissance-patterned body who is attempting over and over again to reweave her destiny, dis-assembling her *self* to be able to re-assemble it later. In Kahraman's peculiar semiosis of unsettlement, disidentification and even at times, depersonalization, the image of the disassembled body and a multiple self, turns into an intimate portrait of the author, drawn on the body of the world as an act of putting the world and the self – back together and giving them a promise of refuturing.

Kahraman's works have a communal dimension yet their focus is still mostly on individual and personal quests normalized in western subjectivity and art. As in other examples of decolonial art her effort to weave herself and her world anew are related to the past and to memory and not to any specific imaginaries of the present or the future. There are so far few truly interesting examples of decolonial dystopian and utopian works, alternative fictionalized histories and design fictions. This is partly explained by decolonial rejection of grand narratives and progressivist schemes so typical for modern/colonial utopias. Dystopian scenarios contradict the life-asserting idea of re-existence. However, such change narratives could act both as tools and triggers of the communities of change. I mean not just the creolized post-cyber-punk dystopias with a decolonial optics – such as Oscar Campo's film *Yo soy Otro* (2008) or Amat Escalante's *The Untamed* (2016) – but also the positive ontological design fictions representing various promising paths to refuturing.

One example of such struggles is a recent exhibition *Mundos Alternos: Art and Science Fiction in the Americas* (Queens Museum 2019) which has gathered among other artists Chico MacMurtrie and the *Amorphic Robot Works* collective, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Tania Candiani, and *MASA – MeChicano Alliance of Space Artists*. The narratives envisioned by these collectives and artists are built on transcending reality, on imagining and living out an alternative world. They often supply the high-tech focus of conventional dystopias and utopias with indigenous, racialized, dehumanized overtones problematizing various kinds of humans in the Anthropocene when racial, religious, geopolitical and other traditional discrimination forms interplay with environmental, technological and today also *farmacopornographic* forms of coloniality, and where imagining and designing another world requires necessarily abandoning the premises of the present one.

The free birds who are able to leave this world but have not yet grown feet to land, are the anxious and disturbing protagonists of these fictions of unsettlement, the in-between subjects – human and other, who reside neither here nor there, who leave the predictable and dead past for the sake of the living transnational and transmodern present that they hope to refuture. They strive to overcome the immobilizing locality of continental and national ontologies and the modern/colonial predicament, the bleakness of the looming world of total surveillance but also inevitable self-limitations instead of thoughtless consumption and growth. Their re-existence would have to be a collective not individual(istic) endeavor changing the mode of narration, representation, and visuality in understanding of the self and/in the world and a new political imagination to refuturing. Communities of change grounded of necessity in unsettlement, would have to make it into a positive ontological design for the fragile and unstable world and the humbled human who would have to learn how to make this immense and boundless, scarred and injured world into a communal home again.

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