

A Reparative Reading of Feminism

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“Internal critique is an important part of a feminist inheritance.”
(Sara Ahmed, “New Materialisms”)

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to offer a theoretical framework for current feminist debates and vindicate the role of past feminisms as pioneer in many of their assertions, since most present feminisms seek to inhabit, rather than assimilate, previous forms of inclusivity or intersectionality. For this purpose, I will stick to a double-edged methodological tool that has been an object of dispute in feminist and literary studies for the last decades; namely, that of *critique* and *postcritique*, two concepts that could roughly be said to bear witness to old and new ways of doing feminism. My contribution is not to dismiss recent feminist work but to render visible forgotten critiques that have been an essential heritage of feminism. To willingly acknowledge such debts is part of the reparative reading I would like to offer here, one which relies not only on love and gratitude towards feminism, but also on a careful and attentive form of *critique*. The desire for deep knowledge is accretive and demands a closer and more respectful attention to past practices and theoretical positions.

KEYWORDS

Black feminism; Lesbian feminism; Critique; Postcritique; Reparative reading.

1. Introduction: Feminist Critique and Postcritique

In a globalised era in which new technologies and social networks are massively substituting the more attentive skills of reading texts and interpreting reality, the academic field of the Humanities is not an exception to such a practice. In the last decade or so, the boom of interdisciplinary studies, made possible by an unprecedented globalisation of research production, has paradoxically imposed a homogeneous corpus of inquiry that seems to be moving away from the necessary theoretical and methodological diversity and depth. To the extent that most current research is stiffened by our repetition compulsion to quote trendy concepts and authors, often overlooking pioneer studies in the epistemological frameworks we rely on, our age can be defined as one that effaces the old for the convenience of present ebbs and flows of financial markets.

Accordingly, there is an overt academic anxiety which, to put it in Bloomian terms, inevitably influences our choices when reading and writing. The discourse of feminism, then, continues to be an essential framework for our research, so much so that the proliferation of feminist trends, such as transnational, transmodern, or material feminism, stand out as foremost dialogues in contemporary research. Bearing in mind the idea that knowledge production is actually more dependent on socio-economic factors than ever, my point of departure in this article stems from the notion of what I have coined as “mass-market” feminism. This could be defined as a current mode concerned with the ways in which feminism beseeches the approval of the reading market and its political allies. My aim is also to make a methodological intervention in current feminist trends so as to vindicate the role of past feminisms as pioneer in many of their assertions, since most present feminisms seek to inhabit, rather than assimilate, previous forms of inclusivity or intersectionality. For this to be so, I will stick to a double-edged methodological tool that has been an object of dispute in feminist and

literary studies for the last decades; namely, that of *critique* and *postcritique*, two concepts that, although they will be further elaborated throughout this article, could roughly be said to bear witness to old and new ways of doing feminism.

As will be shown, my own position towards the above-mentioned new feminist trends is one of ambivalence, embracing a juncture of scepticism and belief, paranoia and reparation, attraction and disavowal. While acknowledging the fundamental role carried out by present feminisms, it is difficult to reconcile their frequent amnesia with the core message of any feminist enterprise: that of gratitude and love towards the object of study, a position that reminisces practices of reparative readings. And yet, the articulation of my critique is also necessarily paranoid, imbued as it is in a “spirit of sceptical questioning ... the claim to be engaged in some kind of radical intellectual and/or political work, and the assumption that whatever is *not* critical must therefore be *uncritical*.”¹ However, for some theorists that defend the new transmodern paradigm, such as Marc Luyckx (1999), our present context “features a creative mix of rational and intuitive brainwork; an enthusiastic embrace of new information technologies; a tolerance, even celebration of diversity”² as main axes from which to build up a more cohesive and relational society. Under these conditions, the progressive homogenization of literary and cultural moods often delivers inter-subjective phenomena. Not coincidentally, in his study on transmodernity, Luyckx also calls for a solid environmental conviction among human beings, capable of opening new paths towards more respectful, egalitarian and spiritual grounds that can intertwine in societies and persons. In a similar vein, Rosa María Rodríguez Magda (2019) remarks that one of the novelties of transmodernity lies precisely in its catalytic inertia to “recover the voices that did not manage to enter the canon, to challenge the criteria of that canon if

necessary, but everything that marginalization aborted is not waiting in concealment for its emergence.”³

Although certain aspects of these definitions share common features with feminist thought—for example, ecofeminism’s denunciation of the exploitation of the natural world as another form of oppression—we must critically consider transmodernity not as a novel discourse, but as part of a continuum and relational bond that has been present for centuries. To illustrate this point, in “Cruelties to Civilization,” written in 1897, naturalist and humanitarian Henry Salt wrote that the emancipation of men and the emancipation of animals “are inseparably connected, and neither can be fully realized alone” as he believed that capitalism “victimized both nature and people.”⁴ Thus, while the transmodern looks at the past in an attempt to give voice to subaltern peoples and histories, among which non-human entities are included, it simultaneously stands out within a globalised present unavoidably defined by a permanent, albeit technological, interconnectedness that prevents accretive and more attentive ways of reflection.

As I see it, transmodernity should engage in the intellectual task of recovering past knowledge, giving way to a more relational framework of horizontal epistemology, considered not as innovative approaches to literature and culture, but rather as an ethical duty on our part, if only to acknowledge the dialectic relationship between past and present. Accordingly, Rodríguez Magda elaborated on transmodernity as a synthesis between modernity and postmodernity, as “the transubstantiation of [these] paradigms through communicating vessels,”⁵ thus offering an encompassing response to past patterns of epistemological conundra. Rodríguez Magda’s initial position has been effaced with the passing of time, since such “communicating vessels” refer to “new forms of relationship, social networks (such as chatting sites, Facebook, Twitter), a site

of static connectivity through which groups communicate and interact” (6). In her revision of the concept of transmodernity, then, she overtly admits that the conceptualization of this new paradigm is compatible with the propinquity of our present society, which urges us to live in a permanent state of fast consumption and newness. Not coincidentally, promotion in academic careers in the Humanities demands the building up of state-of-the-art concepts and paradigms from which to address the complex global threats we must face, thus the prolific production of articles and books in our field. In the process, questions about the feminist canon and its popularity often emerge as conditional on challenging categories of gender experience. In this way, feminism becomes compatible with a compromise between the self and society; difficulty and endurance; loss and reparation. What has received less attention, however, is whether recent feminisms have fully internalized the lessons of earlier feminist studies so that recounting the efforts of previous generations of feminist scholars may serve as a reservoir of the sheer power of both knowledge and action, as a symbiotic force capable of altering the real.

Having in mind all these premises, the present article seeks to pay homage to a wide range of feminists who, already in the 1970s, were pioneers not only in drawing a critical consciousness upon patriarchal strictures and exploring intersectional bonds from which to forge female solidarity, but also in keeping a growing visibility among (non-white) women doing feminism. As pointed out, my aim in this contribution is not to dismiss recent feminist work but to ground it more solidly, render visible partly forgotten critiques that have been an essential heritage of feminism, and examine their influence in today’s feminist panorama. Such is the case of so-called black feminism and lesbian feminism, which laid the foundations for the inclusion of race, class and sexuality to contest normative white Western feminism. Paradoxically enough, the

emergence of queer theory in the early 1990s eroded the determination with which such minority feminisms brought to the fore questions of female identity, in favour of other non-heteronormative identities, mainly gay, transsexual and transgender ones. Yet, like intersectional feminism today, the institutionalization of queer theory, acting as a fashionable umbrella term both inside and outside the academia, has contributed to creating a double-edged ambivalence: while dynamically fostering an array of non-heteronormative identities as a necessary step in the recognition of all identities, queer theory has also consistently veiled the vindications and actions of previous feminist authors.

To acknowledge such debts is part of the reparative reading I would like to offer here, one which relies not only on love and gratitude towards feminism, but also on the careful and attentive form of critique that has informed my research for the last twenty five years. The desire for in-depth knowledge is accretive and demands a closer and more respectful attention to past practices and theoretical positions. To put it in Sara Ahmed's words: "the work of critique is a form of intellectual work that requires engaging closely with a range of work."⁶ Simultaneously, taking up the call for a reparative reading of feminism means loving and nurturing its object of study under the pressures of neoliberal globalisation, among which a more exhaustive form of critique must be taken into consideration. If current feminist and literary discourses are reluctant to critique, these trends should be persuaded to incorporate it as a constitutive part of their own ethos, a purpose that this article also attempts to articulate.

The different labels used to define feminist trends have been inherent to the historical, social and economic contexts from which feminism has emerged: 'Enlightenment feminism,' 'French feminism,' 'Third-World feminism,' 'liberal feminism,' 'Marxist feminism,' 'lesbian feminism,' 'black feminism,' 'transnational

feminism,' 'intersectional feminism,' 'queer feminism,' 'ecofeminism,' 'material feminism,' etc. What these approaches have in common is their active engagement with analysing the condition of the present time in which they emerge, both in political and historical terms. Thus, it is not a coincidence that most research in the Humanities and activist grassroots movements are attuned to address the anxious needs of our present society: poverty, migration, bare life, neoliberalism, climate change, violence and discrimination among others. In the last few decades, there have proliferated different epistemological and ontological turns—the ethical turn, the trauma turn, the affect turn, the material turn, the posthuman turn—as necessary discourses on which to draw wider conversations among literary and cultural representations of identitarian categories. Concomitantly, the recent turn to reparative readings allows us to move toward the pleasures and the losses of a text, cultivating ambivalent feelings as a performative practice that rejects the dogmatism of dominant paradigms. Yet, rather than exploring rooted political and intellectual inheritances from the past, present-day feminist trends, including transmodern and material feminism, focus on a structural forgetting that has become the keynote of a progressivist ethos aimed at being descriptive and compelling instead of internally critical. In the name of renewed attention to identity categories, then, most present-day feminism partakes in defining a universalizing tendency of thought that confirms the longstanding dispute between academic feminism as opposed to street feminism, blaming the former for being elitist and having accommodated to the pressures of neoliberal globalisation.

Overall, and as I see it, the discourse of feminism hovers in a state of ambivalence as a method of critical inquiry, fully articulating both an alluring and a revulsive rationale concerned with neoliberalism only to engage in neoliberal practices of excessive consumption and writings in turn. As a globalised product, feminism

“sells” as it is part of the publishing industry in all kinds of spheres and concerns. Correspondingly, it participates in a cultural arbitrage that dwells on a strong homogenizing drive in what academics produce, affirming the logics of neoliberalism, while employing an intensely melancholy tone to regret the loss of an intellectual autonomy that no longer seems possible in this globalised world. The lack of diversity in what we write and read favours a model of knowledge limited by economic and cultural moods, pushing intellectual activity and activism towards a dependency on the power of the market. And yet, as a product of current neo-liberalism, feminism cannot do without critique: only by unfolding theoretical axes in a retrospective way will social transformation and action become real since, as history has taught us, forgetfulness breeds violence and other forms of oppression. This might sound tautological: we are what we are thanks to an archive of feminist knowledge and struggles narrating the lives of heterogeneous women before us, who meaningfully put the past into a transformative and dialectical relationship with the present. Unless past feminist practices are fully known and assimilated in our discourses and actions, the legacy of inequality will still persist, for the same mistakes are liable to be made again. While transmodernity dwells on an inter-relational paradigm of ideas and fundamentally fosters an inclusive impulse towards equality all over the globe, its lack of *critique* as a methodological intervention may position it far from my theoretical predilections. Rather, I share here Susan Sontag’s concern about the reading wars of recent years eliciting ambivalence as a form of critical interrogation and research:

I plead the goal of self-edification, and the goad of a sharp conflict in my own sensibility. I am strongly drawn to Camp, and almost as strongly offended by it. That is why I want to talk about it, and why I can ... To name a sensibility, to draw its contours and to recount its history, requires a deep sympathy modified by revulsion.⁷

This type of research chooses an ambivalence that insists on both *critique* and *postcritique* as ways of doing feminism, thus recurrently looking for an equilibrium between the old and the new, between a past that is considered futile and unproductive and a present that is granted innovation and comfort, as if it was really the case.

2. 'The Times We're In': Towards a Reparative Reading of Feminism

If enhancing a feminist sensibility can entail, in Sontag's words, a "deep sympathy modified by revulsion," my feminist critique, then, stems from a hybrid position in present feminist interpretation, one that is both suspicious and careful, paranoid and reparative, to use Eve K. Sedgwick's terminology. In doing so, I would like to point out that both epistemological positions, the paranoid and the reparative, are possible and not necessarily contradictory. In fact, feminism itself can be defined as a critical discourse that has enacted a paranoid reading on canonical discourses, anticipating a hypervigilance and anxiety towards texts that Paul Ricoeur defined as "the hermeneutics of suspicion."⁸ According to Sedgwick, the paranoid critic becomes a truth-teller and occupies a sense of personal superiority with respect to the text, foreclosing positive outcomes such as good surprises. In developing her critique on paranoid reading, Sedgwick remarks that "paranoia is anticipatory, *there must be no bad surprises*, reflexive and mimetic. Paranoia is a strong theory, it is a theory of negative affects,"⁹ all of which suggests that paranoid reading reinforces the wielding agency of the critic over the text. In the context of critical theory, from Marxist to deconstructive, feminist and queer theory, paranoid inquiry has been a privileged methodology and its primary rhetorical genre has been coined as *critique*, "which gives the critic sovereignty in

knowing, when others do not, the hidden contingencies of what things really mean,”¹⁰ that is, the critic sees what others do not see.

Conversely, Sedgwick elaborated on a reparative reading that could actually prompt more affective responses in the reader, such as hopefulness and creativity, inaugurating what is nowadays known as *postcritique*. Thus, in “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading” (1996), she offers a reparative account of reading texts that enhances an alternative ethical position founded on the care of the text: “an empathetic view of the other as at once good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care.”¹¹ Such potentiality is based on Melanie Klein’s ambivalent and compelling account of the transformations of affective life, to which Sedgwick resorts in her research. In her 1940 writings on infant development, Klein described the “paranoid/schizoid position” as one characterized by hatred, anxiety and envy, a position of alertness to the objects that the neonate defensively projects into the world. By contrast, the “depressive position,” despite its name, “is an anxiety-mitigating achievement that the infant or adult only sometimes, and often only briefly, succeeds in inhabiting,”¹² thus encompassing, albeit fleetingly, a range of repairing affects that can challenge a fractured self. In this respect, Klein envisaged the notion of “phantasy” to explain how the baby relates to its inner and outer world psychically.¹³ In Klein’s conception, phantasy offers an unconscious instinctual life capable of creating a world of imagination and pleasurable object-relations to counteract anxiety attacks and persistent frustration. It is this rhetoric of reparative reading that Sedgwick vindicates as an activist politics, “a flight into depression, occasionally, but on a more reliable basis and more productively and pleurably, a flight from depression into pedagogy.”¹⁴

Following this method of finding a more productive pedagogy, not only in our academic research, but also in the classroom, the growing popularity of the term

postcritique has signalled a new path for feminist and queer studies alike.¹⁵ More attuned to the exhaustion of new methodologies in the Humanities from which to forge alternative forms of critique, other than poststructuralist and queer accounts of identity categories, the current dominance of postcritical and posthermeneutic forms of analysis, best illustrated by the turn to new materialism and postanthropocentric theory, has resulted in a rejection of previous frameworks of analysis that were more concerned with the representation of identity as a linguistic and performative form of knowledge. Such is the case of Judith Butler's accountability of the materiality of the body (1990), which, for feminist new materialists such as Karen Barad and Rosi Braidotti, is regarded as anti-realist and anthropocentric "due to its enclosure of the performative process, including resistance and agency, within language and signification, so that the constitutive outside in her account remains inaccessible except as an outside within language or as excess. Therefore, matter remains a passive product of discursive practices."¹⁶ In contrast, new materialist feminism accords matter an active role through the iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming,¹⁷ and asks scholars to "collectively cultivate a *stubbornly realist attitude*."¹⁸ According to such methodology, present feminism should invoke realist epistemologies and situate women's concerns at the core of its critical stance while simultaneously embracing global threats such as climate change, poverty, migration and violence. And yet, the tendency in the Humanities to flatten modes of reading and to offer descriptive accounts of what already exists is also a form of tourism, "an analytic mode that sees things as inert objects to be observed like scenery."¹⁹ In my view, feminism must remain paranoid, adopting a critical attitude toward injustice and violence and yet focusing on its objects of study with a reparative and affective approach. In the history of feminism many scholars have

outlined this combination of methods in more explicit or veiled ways, thus foregrounding the importance of ambivalent axes of knowledge production.

Although the article that oriented scholars to this path of inquiry was Sedgwick's "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," first published in 1996, Donna Haraway's contributions to feminism in the 1980s were the first attempt to engage with an attentive and more careful interdisciplinary approach to biology and ecology, embracing the more relational and inclusive reparative model of hermeneutic. As Love has explained, "in *Primate Visions*, Haraway outlines an approach that combines a meticulous, faithful attention to her objects of study with powerful indictments of colonial, racial, sexual, gender, and capitalist oppression."²⁰ Deeply engaged with scientific inquiry, Haraway also remained committed to alternative versions of feminist epistemology, "suggesting that critique and care are not mutually exclusive" (53) and that feminism cannot prohibit an attention to biology and other matters. The emergence of second-wave feminism marked the social-constructionist stance through which feminism has been routinely defined as anti-essentialist. Yet, the so-called new materialism seeks to pay attention to the intricate mechanisms that configure the ontology of the body as relational, in order to understand the mutual interaction of nature and culture—what Karen Barad calls "intra-action."²¹ Informed by important quantum theorists such as Niels Bohr, Barad's physicist account poses a challenge to critical feminist epistemologies and their "representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers, and things" (813), advocating an inseparability between "the observed object" and "the agencies of observation" (814). Barad resorts to physical optics, science studies and queer theory to offer an active "posthumanist notion of performativity that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors" (808). Understanding the active role of matter in the cultural construction of the world

requires an interdisciplinary approach between physical and social sciences, and this includes a thorough process of rethinking the ontology of the (female) body that feminism and queer theory are carrying out from interdisciplinary perspectives. In turn, Barad's intra-action questions Butler's work for privileging the epistemological over the ontological; that is, Butler's view that ontology is always already intertwined in the heteronormative regimes of power and knowledge from which the subject cannot escape. In contrast to Butler's view, for Barad ontology must be always object-oriented and conceived as playing an active and essential part in the process of the materiality of the physical body.

Barad's insights have been followed by new materialist feminists, providing a way of commitment to a metaphysics of sexual difference that calls for the "material-discursive"²² of all bodies. As the term suggests, this approach draws a special emphasis on the mutual processing of matter and discourse, based on what Barad has called "agential realism": "an account of technoscientific and other practices that takes feminist, antiracist, poststructuralist, queer, Marxist, science studies, and scientific insights seriously" (810). Such a position recalls Rosi Braidotti's account of practices that define the mattering of the world; that is, envisaging a radical continuum between nature and culture, a "nature-cultural and humanimal transversal bonding,"²³ which stems from Spinoza's monistic ontology.

However, far from being radically new, this theoretical framework has also been fundamentally infused by previous feminist literature.²⁴ As Braidotti notes, since the 1970s, feminism has sought to foster a political alliance with the "insurrection of women—as the others of 'Man'—and other 'others,' like LGBT+, non-whites (postcolonial, black, Jewish, indigenous and native subjects) and non-humans (animals, insects, plants, trees, viruses, fungi, bacteria and technological automata)."²⁵ Drawing

on this, critical posthumanity must be engaged in the egalitarian ethics of defining subjectivity as intertwined by complex assemblages of human and non-human forces. This explains the urgency to theorize *zoe*, the non-human but vital force of life. Braidotti defines *zoe* as the core of posthuman ethics, embracing analyses of power that denounce social and economic forms of exclusion and dominations of all types.²⁶ Stretching her previous theorizations on the female nomadic subject, Braidotti further elaborates on nomadic lines of transversal research; namely, “feminist, queer, migrant, poor, de-colonial, diasporic, diseased humanities”²⁷ that track new border crossings capable of providing solutions for real-life threats, such as environmental disasters, climatic migration, species extinction, poverty, neoliberal epistemic violence, pandemic diseases, etc. If a posthuman ethics involves the formation of new alliances among active minoritarian subjects, the plea for a material feminism must be defined by a horizontal conceptualization of the nature-culture continuum, one that aims at sustaining an “intra-action”²⁸ politics, accounting for non-human and human forms of agency as well as for other forms of intervention envisaged by transcorporeality, queer ecologies and posthuman feminist ethics. Interestingly, such a relational motivation has also been endorsed by previous generations of feminists working in the fields of ecofeminism²⁹ and queer ecologies,³⁰ for whom sexual politics is deeply influenced by environmental-spatial dimensions and rural and urban spaces in the promotion and configuration of sexual identities. In other words, the regulation by institutions of natural spaces and the interaction with them may help to frame these ecological practices as sites of resistance and exploration from which to theorize human/non-human relationships. The task of a posthuman ethics, then, seems to revolve around reparative feminist theories of mutual interconnectedness in order to bring them to the fore and offer a thorough account of the symbiotic relation between self and other.

3. An Archive of Knowledge: Feminism Revisited

I would like to start this section by recalling Katherine Hayles' notion of "reflexivity" and its subversive effects when applied to the rise of contemporary critical theory, or what this critic calls the "cybernetics of the observer," understanding by observer someone who is outside the system he or she observes. For Hayles, reflexivity "is the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made, through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates."³¹ This definition has cogent implications for what it means to count as a human, since differences of gender, race, sexuality, ability and social class, to name but a few, become essential when assessing the role of technology and the forms of access to knowledge. Hayles goes a step further when she introduces the term "skeuomorph"—from archaeological anthropology—to name "a feature that is no longer functional in itself but refers back to a feature that was functional at an earlier time" (7). This term simultaneously reinforces and undermines past and future, since the new cannot be spoken except in relation to the old. In this vein, my recalling of old concepts and reparative impulses used in feminism, which have been mostly erased from the theory emerging in our times, means to offer a constructive attempt to authenticate those actions as part of our literary and cultural heritage. Moreover, such archaeological move aims at leaving an imprint on us as well as at re-enacting critique and care as the legacy of the same feminist mood.

Remarkably enough, the publication of the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in 1983, was the response to a number of earlier writings by women of colour, lesbians and white feminists whose interests were solely focused on the relationships between the sexes and between women. While the first edition of *This Bridge* was published in 1979, the 1983 version offered a more international and intersectional

perspective. The impetus at the heart of this collection was “to forge links with women of color from every region as the number of recently immigrated people of colour in the U.S. grows in enormous proportions.”³² Although the historical, political and social changes in the late 1970s and early 1980s were indeed different,³³ the questions and challenges for these writers remained the same; namely, to identify and denounce the ontological conditions of systemic violence exerted upon women of colour, poor women, lesbians and workers. To these “refugees of a world on fire,”³⁴ Third World feminism “does not provide the kind of easy political framework that women of colour are running to in droves” (1). Thus, in this collection, the editors, Moraga and Anzaldúa, claimed that the need for a broader movement that compasses and trespasses the borders of nation, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation had never been so strong.

The title of my article reverses Anzaldúa’s contention that “all words are noise if not accompanied with action ... we can’t afford to stop in the middle of the bridge with arms crossed.”³⁵ Indeed, more than three decades ago, these women were calling for action. *This Bridge* allowed them to come out of the academic shadows and change consciousness, dismantling, in Audre Lorde’s words, “the Master’s House” and overthrowing colonial, pro-racist legacies accommodated under liberal democracies. And yet, this collection of essays is thoroughly exposed as a valuable archive not only of their most intimate feelings and experiences as mothers, lovers, and workers, but also of the theoretical roots of their radicalism. Throughout six different sections, well-known writers and theorists such as Toni Cade Bambara, Jo Carrillo, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Norma Alarcón, Chrystos and many others, denounced the systemic oppression they suffer because of their race, sexuality and class. According to Moraga and Anzaldúa, the ultimate purpose of their writing was to begin a Third World Revolution by denouncing “the exhaustion we feel in our bones at the end of the day,

the fire we feel in our hearts when we are insulted, the knife we feel in our back when we are betrayed, the nausea we feel in our bellies when we are afraid, even the hunger we feel between our hips when we long to be touched” (xviii). For most of them, being lesbians constituted the venue through which their oppression became more fiercely silenced, thus making them more prone to suffering poverty and social exclusion.

Although their call for action was mainly made as Latinas and Chicanas living in the U.S., these women were also concerned about the internalized oppressive imagery of an androcentric culture whose epistemological tentacles stigmatized whoever seemed “other,” including the bodies of (disabled) women, gays, Asians, Africans, etc. Hence, their insistence on building bridges across different cultures. In this sense, Maxine Hong Kingston’s book, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts*,³⁶ also became a cornerstone for the articulation of the fear and alienation of minorities against “the white ghosts.” Another aspect these writers have in common is their target against white feminists who, they argued, have usurped the name of feminism as an economic privilege at the expense of non-Western women. Concomitantly, in “Towards a Black Feminist Criticism,”³⁷ Barbara Smith articulated the link between sexual and racial politics as the site for an expression of black female sexuality, historically denied and oppressed. For a black woman to be a feminist and a lesbian in an increasingly male-supremacist, neoliberal and imperialist world, was and still is an act of resistance.³⁸ Embracing lesbianism as an epistemological discourse of struggle and freedom from coerced heterosexuality attested to their liminal identity positions as both victims and rebels. While there is certainly “no beauty in poverty”³⁹ and most of them were confined to harsh work in the factories or in the fields, Anzaldúa claimed that she refused to learn the self-hatred pestilence imbued in them by racist and homophobic discourse, turning it into love and empowerment: “the violence against us, the violence

within us, aroused like a rabid dog. We bring home the anger and the violence we meet on the street and turn it against each other” (206). By calling for the metaphorical construction of a bridge that connects women of different colours and classes, she advocated an in-between space as combining local and global alliances from which to foster stronger attachments of gender, race, class, and sexuality.

In summary, Anzaldúa was already doing *postcritique* as an affective mode of warding off colonial frameworks of power, and re-instating, instead, a consistent care towards hopefulness. And yet, her position constructively adopted *critique*, characterized by indignation, anger and suspicion, which leads us to practices of consciousness raising and discovery of the ideology underlying the text. Accordingly, feminist critique has long provided us with critical tools to interrogate the objectivity of the scientific accounts about the subject, truth and history. Such was the utility of deconstruction, a discourse regarded nowadays as destructive and corrosive, which was greeted by Spivak in the 1990s as her critical tool to fight against colonialism and interrogate many of the premises of Marxism and Western feminism. In her own words: “deconstruction, if one wants a formula, is, among other things, a persistent critique of what one *cannot not want*.”⁴⁰ Critique can validly represent a commitment to a careful examination of the world across disciplines. It, then, can be paradoxically imbued with hope.

Many other critical race theorists have contributed to drawing persistent critiques and dialogues in the Humanities about identity, ethics and politics. Some of the most outstanding critics were bell hooks,⁴¹ Patricia Collins⁴² and Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term “intersectionality”⁴³ in order to encompass the epistemological conditions of being a black and poor woman in a specific US borderline context, questioning horizons of exclusion in the terrain of gender, race, class and

sexuality. Similarly, Barbara Smith called all types of women, from grassroots to academics, for collective political action aimed at creating a sense of women's solidarity based on multiple axes of oppression. As she put it:

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism: feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of colour, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement.⁴⁴

As Smith went on to argue, Third World Women became the subject matter of many literary, artistic and academic works while they were still denied access to publication and the classroom. Similarly, she complained that “in leftish feminist circles we are dealt with as a political issue, rather than as flesh and blood human beings” (61). Historically, there has been a small number of white feminists in the academia who denounced the multiple oppressions of gender, race, sexuality, class, religion, age and disability. However, while these white feminists approach the subject from various theoretical positions—Marxist, lesbian, queer and postcolonial studies—for women of colour, institutional racism is both an ideology and a real threat expressed in their fear “of losing one's power, of a loss of status, control, knowledge” (62). This allusion to emotions and feelings provides a complementary theoretical framework that underscores anti-racist and anti-homophobic alliances among feminists, without the risk of whitewashing the notion of cultural identity.

By claiming the establishment of this symbolic communion stripped of violence, hatred and such insidious affects as shame, resentment and guilt, these non-white feminists inaugurated a process of de-hegemonization of patriarchal praxis meant to

dismantle its heteronormative structures of love and economics. This understanding of a community of women united across discourses on gender, race, class and sexuality echoes the struggles of many Latin-American women in Liberation Feminist Theology groups. Doing Liberation Theology has traditionally involved a male praxis to unveil the class interests of those wielding power in the Church, thus de-articulating the oppressive capitalist market systems upon the poor and Christians, among which women and children are the most vulnerable. Although this doctrine was widely popular in the 1970s and 1980s, thanks to the work of influential theologians and philosophers such as Enrique Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation*,⁴⁵ the work of some feminist theologians denouncing stories of domestic violence and male power abuse is less well-known.⁴⁶

Hence, the critique of Liberation Theology, which claims to be a theology done at the margins, being carried out from the margins, can only be convincing if its patriarchal paradigm is at least opened to the women who have been denied a voice within it. In this vein, Marcella Althaus-Reid's work *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology* takes on the discussion of Liberation Theology from a transversal queer perspective, bringing together "issues of economic exclusion and love, reflecting on the family from a queer, transversal perspective rooted in poverty, alienation and spirituality which people develop in times of globalization" (8). Althaus-Reid interrogates the praxis of the church as action from "the margins of the margins," (9) and denounces the colonial nature of Liberation Theology exerting a systematic "theological eviction" (74) making grandmothers, mothers and daughters homeless. Because God cannot be excluded by sexual heteronormativities, we must hear the voices of all types of women in the community, fostering generosity, courage and solidarity. Articles written by indigenous women such as Aurora Lapiedra's "Yo Siento

a Dios de Otro Modo” (“I Feel God in a Different Way”)⁴⁷ came to “question the alienation of gender, Christianity and culture without apology” (105).

Lapiedra’s statement echoes the current demands of so-called transnational feminism, summarised by McLaren as the pursuit of “new solidarities among feminists of all stripes and colors.”⁴⁸ In the book edited by Margaret McLaren, *Decolonizing Feminism: Transnational Feminism and Globalization*, Chandra Talpade Mohanti, a well-known postcolonial and transnational feminist, notes the importance of theorizing the implications of feminism in neoliberal times. She explicitly addresses issues such as “militarized national borders, massive displacements of peoples (war, climate, and economic refugees); proliferation of corporatist, racist, misogynist cultures, lean-in and glass ceiling liberal feminisms, and the rise of right-wing, proto-fascist governments around the world” (vii). Mohanti’s main aim is to “decolonize feminism” (vii) in an increasingly transnational geopolitical landscape that continues to exclude certain types of identities and epistemological possibilities of knowledge. As we all know, the role of the new technologies and social media has contributed to forging new ways of solidarity among anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic communities, making it easier to consolidate the mobilization of women and men all around the world. In this respect, one only has to think of the International Women’s Strikes on March 8th and a globalized vision of feminism in which diverse “gendered and racialized communities of women (cis and trans) across the spectrum of class, sexuality, ability and citizenship status” (ix) gather in huge demonstrations, publicly showcasing female empowerment, if only temporarily for a day. On the other hand, the promotion of a transnational feminism lies in its harsh critique upon ‘lean-in’ feminism, that is, a liberal type of upper-middle class, white, Western feminism that systematically ignores “women in the formal labour market working in the sphere of social reproduction and

care, and unemployed and precarious working women.”⁴⁹ For theorists such as Mohanti, then, in order not to disregard the socio-economic rights of non-Western women, the key is to look for different methodological tools capable of extending intersectional knots of feminist endeavour around the world.

This search for alliances among different women constituted the *raison d'être* of Third World Feminism, the movement that laid the foundations of what nowadays is known as Transnational Feminism. As Silvia Pellicer-Ortín and Julia Kuznetski note, “founded upon postcolonial studies, gender studies, and material feminism, transnational feminism emphasises structural inequality, material conditionality and critical consciousness.”⁵⁰ In my opinion, transnational feminism today should unapologetically try to rescue the authentic voices of women, not in a process of re-colonization, converting it into “an exotic product for the North Atlantic academic market,”⁵¹ but rather to find the critique within, with the purpose of offering more reparative readings of past feminist and queer practices. The need to decolonize heteronormative structures of power is a premise that women of colour and Third World feminism have traditionally claimed, for this dynamics involves the structural superiority of one race and gender over the others.

María Lugones has carried out substantial research in this direction, not only emphasizing the intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality in feminist analyses, but most remarkably, in thinking that “transnational intellectual and practical work that ignores the imbrication of the coloniality of power and the colonial/modern gender system also affirms this global system of power.”⁵² For Lugones, theorizing global domination continues to be a harsh task: while intersectional feminism has exposed the exclusion of non-white women in the liberatory struggles of feminism, oppression and violence continue to be exerted on non-white women by their male counterparts. Unless

there is recognition and collaboration among women and men, both white and non-white, the forging of new waves of solidarity will continue to be resisted. All in all, the ideas of visibility, social justice and solidarity that McLaren and Mohanti defend in their volume, necessary as they are to fight oblivion, are not new, as they were already tackled by black and lesbian feminists in their commitment to both paranoid and reparative methods of knowledge. The distinct trait that separates them, I would dare to conclude, is that whereas earlier feminists exerted an overt paranoid attitude towards their contemporary production of knowledge, be it feminist or not, members of current transnational and transmodern trends remain faithful solely to a reparative reading of feminism, forgetting, perhaps, that feminism cannot do without *critique*.

Conclusion

In her essay “Recollections of Ilfracombe” (1856), British writer Mary Anne Evans (aka George Eliot) recalled the delight in observing seaweeds and sea anemones as creatures that captivated the Victorian imagination while inspiring a discourse of interconnectedness of all life forms. Eliot’s writings also pondered the importance of natural science and concepts of cooperation and function-form relationships, particularly in connection with seaside environments and new valuations of plant and animal life as an epitome of increasing knowledge. She carefully embraced an ecological thought that attempted to avoid hierarchical constructions of men-women, and human-non-human difference, challenging teleological accounts of human superiority. Her critique of human epistemological categories gave way to enactments of sympathy deeply rooted in the environment, concepts that are nowadays widely discussed in the field of feminist posthuman ethics and queer ecologies, as has been explained in the course of this article. Hers was just but another gesture of pointing to

feminism as a discourse within the domain of the possible and the contingent, involving both theory and action, discourse and care, positing possibilities beyond the androcentric norm.

My gesture is about recalling previous feminist works by reading them in an exhaustive way, harbouring the seeds of what has come before us. We need to look again at these texts as part of our ethical commitment as feminists working in the academia. Sexism, racism, homophobia and other types of hate speech and violence are structural rather than solipsistic and, as previous generations of feminist thinkers have shown, the concept of biology has insistently been appropriated to support those discriminatory practices. We need to acknowledge more emphatically the work done by the diverse trends within feminism from its very origins, often involving productive and generous forms of solidarity. Although some contemporary feminist trends continue excluding part of the female population, the point of entry for a fairer and more diverse feminist politics must go through the contestation of those arrogant positions, as exposed by the legacy of the writers and critics recalled here. The study of feminism can indeed be revitalised through paranoid and reparative critiques that combine realist and imaginative dimensions as possible solutions for gender inequality, prompting feminism to understand these positions as constitutive and inter-relational approaches. Such is part of our commitment as feminist academics: one that is able to bridge the gap among different generations of women from all around the world, encompassing local and global practices aimed at the decolonization of the mind, critically and affectively. While collective action is a very complex goal to achieve because of the lack of individual freedom, it has been possible to build up collaborative and accretive alliances among different feminists in order to practice non-violent and affective attachments

towards identity categories and their most vulnerable embodiments. This is the lesson from the past that we should not forget.

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1. Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 43.
 2. Luyckx, “The Transmodern Hypothesis,” 971–982.
 3. Magda “The Crossroads of Transmodernity,” 25.
 4. Cited in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 20.
 5. Aliaga-Lavrijsen and Yebra-Pertusa, *Transmodern Perspectives*, 5.
 6. Ahmed, “New Materialism,” 30.
 7. Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” 275.
 8. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, 1977.
 9. Sedgwick, *Touching, Feeling*, 130.
 10. Wiegman, “The Times We’re In,” 7.
 11. Sedgwick, *Touching, Feeling*, 137.
 12. Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein,” 636.
 13. Klein, *Melanie Klein*, 1986.
 14. Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein,” 640.
 15. Various critics working in queer studies have drawn their theoretical background from Sedgwick’s reparative turn, paving the way for the emergence of affect theories. For further information, see Cvetkovick, *An Archive of Feelings*; Muñoz, “Feeling Brown”; Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*; Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*; Love, “The Temptations”.
 16. Jagger, “The New Materialism,” 329.
 17. Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity,” 2003.
 18. Latour, “Critique,” 231.

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19. Love, "The Problem of Critique," 65.
 20. Ibid., 66.
 21. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 808.
 22. Ibid., 810.
 23. Braidotti, "Critical Posthumanities," 1.
 24. Kristeva, *Desire in Language*; Haraway, *Simians*; Creed, *The Monstrous Feminine*.
 25. Ibid., 9.
 26. Spivak, *Bonding*, 1996; Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 2003.
 27. Braidotti, "Critical Posthumanities," 19.
 28. Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity," 2003.
 29. Cuomo, *Feminism and Ecological Communities*, 1998.
 30. Montimer-Sandilands, *Queer Ecologies*, 2010.
 31. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 7.
 32. Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge*, 1.
 33. For example, the Reagan and Thatcher administrations, the violent segregation in Apartheid South Africa, the anti-war movements of the late 1960s in Europe, Pinochet's political repression in Chile, the terrorism of the IRA in Ireland and ETA in Spain, etc.
 34. Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge*, 1983.
 35. Ibid., xviii.
 36. Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*, 1976.
 37. Smith, "Black Feminist Criticism," 1977.
 38. Arnold, "Lesbian Fiction," 1976.
 39. Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge*, 201.
 40. Spivak, "Bonding in Difference," 28, original emphasis.
 41. hooks, *From Margin to Center*, 1984.

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42. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 1990.
 43. Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” 1989.
 44. Cited in Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge*, 61.
 45. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 1976.
 46. According to its classical designation, Liberation Theology is defined as “a theological orthopraxis of economic and political liberation, contextualized in the experience of Latin American political and economic oppression and the struggle for social transformation and liberation” (Althaus-Reid, *Feminist Theology*, 124).
 47. Lapiedra, “Popular Religiosity,” 1986.
 48. McLaren, *Decolonizing Feminism*, viii.
 49. *Ibid.*, viii-ix.
 50. Pellicer-Ortín and Kuznetski, *Women on the Move*, 12.
 51. Althaus-Reid, *Feminist Theology*, 105.
 52. Lugones, “Heterosexualism,” 188.

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