WAN & ACTIVIST RESEARCH:TOWARD BUILDING DECOLONIAL AND FEMINIST PROJECTS

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"The project of creating a world anthropologies nework challenges anthropologists to engage not only in worldwide communication but also with knowledge produced in non-academic contexts and in non-scientific realms of experience."

Susana Narotzky (2006:133).

The goal of this paper is to articulate a commonality between WAN and a particular activist research project, called *Precarias a la Deriva*. Acknoweledging their distinctive trajectories, I will try to illustrate possible points of articulation. While WAN is an explicit decolonial venture, Precarias a la Deriva is open about being a feminist project. However I believe that both initiatives share the following two traits: 1) a decolonial approach to knowledge production taking multiple sites of enunciation seriously as well as; 2) a radical feminist understanding of ways of creating a 'common' between singular experiences.

After a brief description of Precarias a la Deriva (PD) and the broader trend of *activist research* in which it is inserted, I will focus on the two traits I put foward are held in common between WAN and PD. I will follow with a brief discussion about how these de-colonial and feminist principles have been translated by other research initiatives, especially in the practice of ethnography. To conclude, I will present a research technique experimented by PD as a possible WAN methodology since it tries to enact those very de-colonial and feminist principles discussed through the paper.

The Activist Research Project by Precarias a la Deriva

Precarias a la Deriva is a heterogenous collective of women that saw in the activity of research a possibility to empower themselves and develop networks of solidarity in order to take action in the current context of labor restructuring in Spain. They wanted to understand the re-articulation of class among women in a post-fordist economy taking into account the differences among them in terms of sexual orientation, socio-economic position, national origin and immigration status. Their goal is to understand how neo-liberal policies are affecting everyday life and to develop forms of organizing adapted to the new labor changes. Their analysis focuses on the site of production and also on the sites of reproduction inspired by work on feminist and neo-marxist political economy. They explicitly claim that their research practices are also greatly inspired by the tradition of action-research, feminist theories of objectivity, post-structuralist notions of difference, as well as the feminist experience of consciousness-raising.

The Precarias a la Deriva research project explores the labor and life conditions generated by the new economy among women located in different spheres of the casualized job market in Madrid. This year and a half long research experiment was hosted in a women's squatted building in a multiethnic and working class neighborhood of downtown Madrid.[1] The *Eskalera Karakola* serves as a referential point of convergence for intermittent as well as more permanent flows of women with different backgrounds living in Madrid. Many encounters are produced thanks to the numerous activities held in

this open and centrally located space. One of those encounters resulted in the heterogeneous and loose network of women who would become the activist reseaach collective of Precarias a la Deriva, starting their own research project: *Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina*. Despite disparities in race, class, family, national origin, educational background, job training, etc. this loose and unbounded group of women shared an affinity for feminism as well as a common everyday experience of drastic labor transformations. The common denominator consisted in going through the increasing precarization of their lives based on the generalization of 'casual, flexible, intermittent, and contingent labor' in Spain and in the European Union. This common experience will became the target of study for this research project. *Precarias a la Deriva* began exploring a common phenomenon, which despite the occupational differnces, was affecting the labor and existential conditions of a variety of women in a similar fashion. Debates on post-fordism, new economy, neo liberal re-structuring, immaterial labor pointed out relevant changes in labor conditions. Social movements across Europe started to coin those (re)emergent labor conditions as *precariedad*. Precarious labor arose after the transition from lifelong-stable jobs, common in industrial capitalist and welfare state economies, to temporary-insecure-low-paying-affective-creative jobs emerging with the globalization of service and financial economy. Thus what in English is usually referred to as flexible, casualized or contingent labor- without any kind of necessary critical connotation- is being politicized in several European countries as 'precarious labor', denouncing its fragile and exploitative character and promoting it as a new identity of struggle.

Within this intellectual and political effervescence, the *Precarias a la Deriva* research project focuses on the labor conditions among women, working at different sites in the urban setting of Madrid. Through a close engagement with their own experiences they will refine the notion of precariety, to articulate a more situated version of it. Their research coalesced around the notion of *'precariedad femenina'* (feminine precarity[2]) as a particular form of flexible labor (gendered but not sexed). Precariedad femenina challenges a notion that can be too-production centered, and offers an understanding able to capture the effects of changing labor conditions in the continuum of production-reproduction. One of this project's conceptual contributions to the notion of precariedad consists in breaking the distinction between 'labor' and 'life' usually maintained by traditional political economy. They analyze how the post-fordist changes in labor are producing post-fordist lives, looking at the new subjectivities generated by or through living as precari*as* (feminine adjective of precari*o*).

The re-emerging trend of activist research among social movements

Precarias' work is linked to a broader contemporary wave as well as a longer genealogy of research practices developed from and by social movements. Current incipient research initiatives that are emerging from social movement processes, and that at the same time are trying to embody movements politics, are called *activist research* or *militant research*. A diverse set of practices are included under this term, for example: the production of counter-maps, watch dog groups and power structure analysis, combination of so called expert knowledge with *minor* knowledges, projects which use their own experience of social struggle to produce analysis and reflection, etc. (Malo 2000). The rise of activist research projects has been such that the very same movements are trying to identify and distinguish between different kinds of politically engaged research. According to an activist group, *the Action Research Network in Europe*[3], some of the research practices that claim to be 'for movements' have been differentiated according to property regimes and ways of production. They conclude that some of the most interesting experiences of activist research could be identified by their collective authorship and their basis in common property laws (through alternative legal mechanisms such as copy-left, Creative Commons, free distribution).

Current initiatives follow many antecedents of research conducted from social movements. One of the members of Precarias, in a prologue to an edited volume entitled *Nociones Comunes* (2004) that collects contemporary initiatives of activist research, identifies four of the main inspirational traditions for this kind of growing practice: 1) participatory action research from Latin America; 2) Feminist

consciousness-rising and epistemology from the US; 3) Co-research from Italy; and 4) Institutional analysis from France. Identifying the conceptual and methodological tools being provided by these traditions, Malo points out how current initiatives are re-appropriating these tools, not simply embracing all of their characteristics but also developing different ones.[4]

Activist Research & World Anthropologies Network

Among the hectic and action-oriented rhythms of movements, activist groups are recording, archiving, and analyzing their own practices of struggle as well as their own experiences of globalization, how they lived under certain global economic processes, and how they could explore ways of intervention in order to share their findings via publications and videos that circulate among movements and generate innovative vocabularies and ways of relating to the changing circumstances. In a parallel way, among the fashion and market-oriented cycles of academic production, a worldwide network of scholars is organizing in decentralized ways, addressing issues such the current north-south asymmetries in the terrain of knowledge production and distribution, and the necessity to challenge the unquestioned dominance of the metropolis in defining the discipline of anthropology (or any field), engaging the multiplicity of radical and diverse anthropologies developed in the margins been ignored in the disciplinary canon.

What do these two political-intellectual projects have in common? Could each of them respectively acknowledge the other as allies in the struggle for producing counter-hegemonic knowledges? In this section, I will try to point out some of the affinities between Precarias' research project and the World Anthropologies initiative. Despite the a-definitional character of WAN, given its stage of continuous unfolding, and its multiplicity of experiences, it is possible to identify certain traits following some of the pieces some of us consider referential within the WAN tradition. Among them, I posit that at least two WAN traits are shared by the principles and research practices of Precarias' project.[5] I will try to point out how both WAN and *Precarias* activist research shared two unique characteristics: 1) the goal to pursue de-colonial thinking and 2) the commitment to engage in feminist research.

1. De-colonial and plural knowledges

> "The world anthropologies project thus aims at pluralizing the prevailing visions of anthropology at a juncture where in which hegemonic, North Atlantic-center discourses about difference prevail"
>
> Gustavo Lins Ribeiro and Arturo Escobar (2006: 8).

The framework of world anthropologies is deeply influenced by the awareness of hierarchical relations in knowledge production marked by the historical construction of canons of expertise, normally established by the powers and authorities that be (such as ex-colonial empires, and state or private driven academic institutions). Critical voices from the *Global South*, have been criticizing the enduring power relationships embedded in current academic production as generating colonialist knowledge (Guha 1983), epistemic violence (Spivak 1998), or inequality of ignorance (Chakrabarty 2000). As part of that sharp critical uprising, the *Modernity/Coloniality and Geopolitics of Knowledge Program* is one of the intellectual trends that is challenging the status quo of the current "geopolitics of knowledge" and imagining cognitive alternatives. The group's goal is to intervene in the discourses of the modern sciences, decolonizing expert knowledge and building spaces for engagement with alternative knowledges.

For the sake of this paper, I will focus on a double fundamental move made by the Modernity/ Coloniality Group that have influenced the WAN project: on the one hand, situating the canon as a generalized local history, and thus allowing one to imagine beyond it; and on the other hand, taking the epistemic power of other local histories and knowledges seriously (Mignolo 2000, Dussel 2000, Escobar 2004). This alternative epistemological framework allows for a radical multiplicity of knowledges in a

horizontal relationship, challenging centers and empowering peripheries not only to get into the conversation but to change the terms of the conversations.[6] This call for pluralizing 'knowledge' has been taken up by the world anthropologies project in an effort to reinvent yet again the discipline in "a critical anthropology of anthropology, one that de-centers, re-historicizes, and pluralizes what has been taken as "anthropology" (Ribeiro and Escobar 2006).

One of the members of the Modernity/Coloniality research group, Katherine Walsh, once posed to me the following question: is activist research, and PD in particular, a decolonial research project?[7] My argument is that the double effort of de-colonizing and pluralizing knowledge is present in the work by *Precarias a la Deriva*. The explicit attempt to go beyond the canon is shown in the variety of sources used in their project, paying attention to who is speaking. The goal of pluralizing knowledge is performed by the very fact that this heterogeneous group of un-conventional researchers engage *in* a research project that will contest expert-based diagnosis of a burgeoning economy. They introduce themselves as knowledge producers, situated within the midst of social movements and within the margins of the economy. I will elaborate below how the treatment of sources of enunciation and the explicit self-definition as knowledge producers used by Precarias la Deriva are two indicators of their de-colonizing and pluralizing approach to cognitive production.

Treatment of sources of enunciation

According to Mignolo, another important representative of the M/C paradigm, one of the methodologies to analyze the level of coloniality of an intellectual product consists in to concentrate on who enounces, and from where, as well as what sources of enunciation are used, rather than focus on the enunciated, it is key.[8] *A la Deriva por los circuitos de la precariedad Femenina* is a very dense a book in terms of references. Though the bibliography one might expect at the end never materializes, detailed foot-notes with complete citations are spread throughout the whole work. Actually they are not footnotes or endnotes in the literal sense, since they are located in the margins, parallel to the main text. This location makes the reading more convenient and the notations become more present, simultaneously integrated into the central argument. The references are hybrid, using works coming from different sources of knowledge production. For instance, they refer to work done by other social movements groups (e.g. *Chainworkers, Hackitectura),* and contemporary Participatory Action Research initiatives (e.g. *Colectivo IOE*). At the same time, renowned intellectual voices –especially Foucault, Benjamin and Haraway- are brought into the central text several times without mentioning a specific work or year of publication. You do not find the usual deferential treatment of these famous authors which needs to be quoted by codified endnotes as in standard academic work. For the elaboration of specific themes, we can find a great number of academic references from different locations.[9]

The amount of academic references, and even the elaborated discourse exposed in this book, is not surprising in the context of free and massive access to higher education programs in Spain, which seems to also have resulted in a closer connection between social movements and institutional intellectualism (understood broadly). Last, but not least, an important source is the participants' reflections. Different participant's voices and web publications are used as sources of concepts rather than as a way to justify a famous author's theory. It is important to note that in the context of a diverse constituency of participants marked by different factors –occupation, ethnic origin, education, sexual orientation, citizenship status –the question of coloniality is taken to heart, giving extra attention to the positions that have historically (and currently) been excluded from occupying sites of enunciation. For example, the analysis of an undocumented domestic worker from Ecuador about contemporary labor conditions and the politics of the border, gains the same status as the interpretation made by a famous Italian intellectual (Virno). Some members of Precarias, in an introduction to an edited volume called *Otras Inapropiables* that compiles different feminist texts, refer to Mignolo to support their desire to challenge

hierarchies based on racial classification in their texts: "La supresión de esa frontera de color en nuestras genealogías políticas e intelectuales ha sido una constante" (2004: 20).[10]

Explicit enunciative position as knowledge producers

By putting multiple sources of knowledge from multiple sites of enunciation in conversation, they are making an explicit argument about the politics of knowledge similar to what the Modernity/Coloniality is doing inside the academy: first, by acting as if academic knowledge is one among others; and second, reclaiming the knowledge that emerges from their particular local histories. Their local histories are linked to being *precarias*. According to their self-definition, being a *precaria* could involve positive, negative and ambivalent aspects. Among the positive ones, the first one listed is the accumulation of knowledges: "Somos precarias. Lo que significa decir alguna cosa buena (acumulación de saberes, conocimientos y capacidades a través de unas experiencias laborales y vitales en construcción permanente), muchas malas (vulnerabilidad, inseguridad, pobreza, desproteccion social) y la mayoria ambivalente (movilidad, flexibilidad)" (2004: 17).[11]

This explicit self-description as producers of knowledge is shared with many social movements'. These movements go beyond a politics of denial –saying NO to everything that is going wrong -to enacting a politics of creation –imagining and putting forward alternatives-. Knowledge, thus becomes one of the productive activities of these movements. These autonomous research groups engage directly with the creation, documentation and diffusion of those *saberes*, *savoirs*, knowledges, coming from social movements.[12] This explicit acknowledgement of social movements as knowledge producers is actually claimed by M/C as well, converging in a relevant argument for engaging social movements as epistemic authorities in multiple fields.

2. Engaging feminist research propositions

While Precarias a la Deriva is explicitly inspired by feminist theories of science and difference, bringing these principles into their research experimentations, one could say that feminism is not so central for the world anthropologies project. Nonetheless I would like to highlight 3 traits discussed within the WAN experience that could be understood and elaborated upon using PD's open and hybrid feminist approach. Firstly, because of world anthropologies' deep engagement in dismantling the hegemonic power of certain theories in the discipline, challenging the male authority prevalent in Anthropology is a constant concern for WAN. In addition though, there are deeper engagements with current feminist thinking that could aid in mutually developing the communication between WAN's and PD's projects. To begin with, there is an emphasis, shared by several WAN members, on grounded academic and scientific work that is simultaneously passionate and politically engaged (Narotzky in press; Visvanathan in press; Berglund in press**)** but in and of itself this may not help in escaping or challenging the universalizing notions of science or social justice. In this regard, taking a cue from PD might be insightful. I'm speaking in particular about how PD also emphasizes scientific work that is simultaneously passionate and politically engaged but additioanly creatively experiments with the notions of situated knowledge as a way to deal with the radical diversity existing within PD**.** This grappling with situated knowledge helps set the ground for the second theoretical insight from feminism that I believe is even more shred between WAN and PD: the conceptual and organizational understanding of difference as articulated by radical multicultural feminism since the late 70s, lead by Third World women and women of color. I would argue that since WAN is trying to network different anthropologies, coming from different positionalities, histories, canons, etc, the work by feminism dealing with differences in the process of building a common project is somehow latent in its way of articulating multiple anthropologies. In the following section I will briefly explore these two characteristics, situated knowledge and articulating

comonalistes amongst singular experiences, showing how they are elaborated in the Precarias' research project.

Scientific research has been normally associated with an ethics of scientific detachment. This 'traditional' understanding of research is thought to further the processes of reification of reality, the establishment of hierarchies according to levels of accuracy, and the development of authoritative representations of people's bodies, voices, worlds. Yet, there are efforts to question and invert those logics, exploring other political possibilities emerging ironically from those same scientific notions. Instead of a politics of subjugation, these notions may help bring about politics of liberation. From the sources that world anthropologies have drawn upon, I briefly address *situated knowledges*.

Donna Haraway has articulated one of the most influential arguments in regards to opening up possibilities for thinking and practicing research in politically engaged ways. In her famous piece on *Situated Knowledges* (1991), Haraway moved critical approaches to science forward by reclaiming an alternative theory of objectivity. Against totalizing, unmarked and universalizing goals of science, radical constructivism has reduced the world to a text. Instead of this "scary" and "disempowering" approach, and its apolitical confinement, Haraway defends feminist empiricism as a more hopeful critical alternative. Feminist empiricism calls for a usable doctrine of objectivity. Haraway in particular introduces the notion of situated knowledges. Through this version of objectivity, the situated and partial location of the viewer allows for a more accurate and in fact better knowledge. "Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision" (1991: 190). This move towards located and embodied objectivities opens possibilities for rethinking research, politics and the world.[13]

Haraway's contribution on *situated knowledges* becomes one of the most powerful foundations for reclaiming research as a site of politics. This notion could be said to reinvigorate a feminist movement that calls for the democratization of science. Precarias a la Deriva's project could be understood as contributing to this democratization of science, with research conducted by 'not-necessarily experts' and within their framework of re-appropriation of research as a form of political action. A wide variety of women —domestic workers, free lance translators, telemarketers, university fellows, sex workers, etc.— come together in order to engage with their own everyday life realities as the basis of the research project. They will record, explain, discuss, and analyze, their experiences in order to make sense and intervene in the current conditions that they are going through. The kind of findings resulting from this research is related to the type of objectivity which Haraway calls for, grounded in situatedness, specificity and embodiment. A *situated knowledges* paradigm which privileges location as the source of knowledge is the basis for the empowerment of this kind of project that "gives primacy to experience as the main epistemological category" (Precarias: 2004: 26).

Precarias' project has been able to engage in a situated approach by providing detailed ethnographic documentation about the materiality of their everyday life. This is how they define the kind of research they are developing in relationship to their own situation or their reality: "Investigación militante es aquel proceso de reapropiación de nuestra capacidad de creación de mundos, que […] interroga, problematiza y empuja *lo real* a través de una seria de procedimientos concretos" (Nociones Comunes 2004: 92; my italics).[14]

Precarias' research project constitutes a political economy of the feminized sectors of the casualized job market. The theoretical framework though had to be attuned to their conditions, combining neo-Marxist notions of affective labor, feminist debates of reproduction, poststructuralist theories of power

and decolonial epistemologies. This framework allows them to identify common material conditions (e.g. post-fordist labor, precariedad) and simultaneously acknowledge radical differences (e.g. a sex worker and a free lance journalist are both flexible, temporary, part-time, and self-employed workers- however there are huge differences in social status, salary, rights, risks, etc). In order to deal with this tension they build in what I believe could be called 'feminist methodology of articulation'.

A Feminist methodology of articulation: Building affinities from differences

Feminist movements have gone through different moments of struggle crystallizing around particular issues. If feminisms from the 70s and 80s were grappling with the recognition of difference within the context of a common and homogenous struggle, today the movement is focusing on "the recognition of commonality within the context of difference" (Anzaldúa 2002: 2). The context of the extreme fragmentation of self-acclaimed differences had to be addressed in the formation of new kinds of feminist communities and common practices. This process, aiming at generating interconnectedness among specificities, has been the goal for radical multicultural feminism (Mohanty 1991, Anzaldúa and Keatin 2002, Haraway 1988). In the same fashion, the project of world anthropologies has engaged in the endeavor of finding common articulations among irreducible different communities and experiences of anthropology. The feminist project proposes a relational understanding of difference going beyond essentialisms imprinted in skin colour, genders, sex, national origin, class, etc. The fact of acknowledging difference does not mean to surrender to a fatalist impossibility for common dialogue and struggle. Bypassing the sentence of incommensurability, the feminist project responded to the crisis of meta-narratives by building webs among situated realities that are able to interact among each other from their particular specificities. The political praxis becomes one of articulation responding not to the call to *unite!* but to the desire and common necessity to *network.*[15]

The goal of articulation of commonalities departing from specific situations is the basis of Precarias research project. What do care givers, sex workers, social workers, free lance —translators, designers, journalists, researchers—, professors, cleaners, students-Telepizza workers have in common? Despite disparities in race, class, family, national origin, educational background, job training, social status, etc., this loose and unbounded group of women started to identify things in common. Acknowledging the tension between the collective and the singular, the projects states: "Nuestras situaciones son tan diversas, tan singulares, que nos resulta muy difícil hallar denominadores communes de los que partir, o diferencias claras con las que enriquecernos mutuamente" (Precarias 2004: 17).[16]

Precarias' project is about searching for commonalities and at the same time fostering singularities while maintaining the above mentioned tension ever before them. They are thinking of ways to articulate "lo común singular" (the singular in common) (2004: 42). The aim was to cross-fertilize communication among radically different specificities in order to form webs of solidarity and support.

Translating decolonial and feminist principles into research methods

Thinking about how these principles could be embedded in research methodologies, we have seen how some of the decolonial and feminist propositions are being enacted in the research practices by Precarias a la Deriva. However, it is important to mention that there are other research experiences that have been experimenting with these principles as well. As a debutant in the paradigm of Modernity/Coloniality my knowledge on decolonial research projects is very limited, being barely aware of some initiatives at practicing and theorizing decolonial methodologies (Sandoval 2000, Tuhai-Smigh 1999, Hames-Garcia 2004). It would be fascinating to engage in an archeology of experiences with decolonial methods, compiling its genealogies and current examples, and identifying concrete procedures to be used in our own anthropological practice. While I do not know yet what a *decolonial ethnography* would look like, we

have multiple examples of what feminist ethnographies could be like.[17] In this last section, I would like —in the spirit of WAN's disruptive relationship with the canon— to engage with a few historical examples of feminist ethnographies that although being from the US have not made it into the discipline's canon.

A History of Absences: The hidden wave of US feminism and its ethnographers

Following Elizabeth Grosz, one should look at history with a purpose, reading the past for a possible future, in a productive way (2000). Since we are looking at a set of ancestors that have been erased from our disciplinary genealogy, I would like to put together this feminist call for engaging the past with the concept of a "sociology of absences" developed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his analysis of the World Social Forum. According to Sousa Santos, this kind of inquiry explores the modes of production of non-existence in order to show available alternatives and affirming an "ecology of knowledges" (2004: 239). In a similar fashion, by looking at the absences within the canon one realizes the production of non-existent figures, in this case, women conducting experimental and innovative ethnographies.[18] By engaging with these invisibilized ethnographers, Anthropology is pluralized: rather that constituting itself as one, it is presented as a multiplicity of anthropologies.

Though focusing on the US, the volume of *Women Writing Culture* provides a great starting point for this endeavor of exploring the absent genealogies of feminist ethnography. Most of the authors being 'discovered' are part of a very interesting historical period in US feminism. Between the first and second waves, there was an explosion of feminist thought and action that is normally ignored by standard histories of US women's movements. During this 'gap' of the teens, twenties, thirties and forties critical ideas of social transformation were spreading in the US, from the labor movement and explosions of political art to new forms of feminism and anti-war underground organizing. It was during the political effervescence of the teens in New York City when Franz Boas was becoming the 'father of American Anthropology'. However, the canon was missing all the innovative work being conducted by feminist women in his intellectual circle. Elsie C. Parsons for example was one of them and was actively involved with the political momentum through the organizing being done by Greenwich Village activists:

> "The teens, particularly the years of World War I, were a time of social ferment and protest in which socialist, feminist, and other radical ideas were common in NYC, especially among the middle-class and upper-class avant-garde in Greenwich Village [ ]. They embedded their critique of gender hierarchy in a critique of the social system. They wanted to break with dichotomized categories of "Man" and "Woman" (Lamphere 1995: 88)

The anthropological work by Elsie C. Parsons focused on women documenting male dominance cross-culturally. Parsons thinks of feminism as *a gift* brought for both men and women offering the "possibility of breaking through rigid social categories" (Lamphere 1995: 91). Parsons worked within the dominant theoretical and methodological terms of her time —evolutionism and functionalism—, however she introduced women and patriarchy as a subject of inquiry. In addition, she played an important institutional and financial role in founding the New School and supporting women researchers, a role normally obscured due to Boas' overpowering fame.

Boas admitted that "all my best students are women" (Babcock 2005: 109) and among them Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead are normally the most renown. In this volume though, both are treated as independent scholars that contributed with key elements to the discipline, anticipating current debates. Without delving too deeply into her intellectual contributions, Benedict brought into light the interpretative and non-authorative character of Anthropology as well as the notion of multiple knowledges outlying the "epistemology of the oppressed" (Babcok 2005). Mead explored the possibilities of performance and public anthropology as well as the dialogical techniques for a multi-vocal anthropology (Lutkehaus 1995).

The circle of women anthropologists studying with and working for Boas during this hidden feminist wave had more surprises in store. Ella Deloria and Mourning Dove were two Native-American women conducting fieldwork in their own reservations and thus embodying and anticipating the figure of the native anthropologist. Some of the most insightful and wonderfully written pieces are *Waterly* and *Co-ge-we-a, the Half-Blood* respectively, in which they explore the fictional character of ethnography, questioning its underlying notion of scientific truth. Engaging fully in the politics of knowledge production and appropriation, they use academic expertise and writing norms in order to subvert its universalizing and distancing gaze. They appeal to the power of performance to evoke the partial and embedded nature of all accounts. They melded cultural knowledge with lived experience creating "new ways of knowing" from their positions in "borderlands". However, instead of acknowledging the distinct epistemes from which these women were speaking from and putting forward, both of them were valued more as informants than as scholars (Finn 2005: 133-143). Both Deloria and Dove embodied the tension between fitting in and resisting the discipline's requirements.

This tension was shared by the African-American Zora N. Hurston's experimenting with different positionalities in conscious and innovative ways. Her writing skills are celebrated as a novelist and maybe as a folklorist, without recognizing that current debates on the politics of writing were very much being addressed and embodied by this cutting-edge figure that was introducing self-reflexivity, literary strategies and her racial position into the ethnography (Hernandez 2005). Finally, the wonderful ethnographic work by the Jewish-American Ruth Landes has been completely erased. However, she was doing pioneer work on gender, race, class and sexuality. Not only thematically was she advancing innovative scholarly work, but also in her writing she was consciously experimenting with self-positionality well before all the disciplinary debates on reflexivity. She inscribed herself as a Jew and woman in her ethnographies -such as in *The City of Women*. In addition, she embedded her critical ideas in the moment of fieldwork, for example practicing her non-othering principles through her inter-racial relations in Brazil and rejecting the upper-middle class' life style (Cole 2005).

This is just a gesture to call attention to the existence of feminist anthropological work since the foundational moments of ethnography. A further archeology of anthropology is still to be done, one that would rescue the feminist work that has been conducted from the amnesia of the discipline, one that would go beyond the history of the US and would engage feminist expressions developed in other world anthropologies.[19]

A Method in Motion: Precarious Drifts/ Derivas Precarias

What would 'WAN ethnographies' look like, feel like? The world anthropologies project is exploring concrete methodological techniques that could embody some of its decolonial and feminist principles. In this section I present the principal research method used by Precarias as a possible inspiration for the WAN ethnographic repertoire. What I would like to name as 'drifting a la femme' captures the different WAN traits outlined above in a methodology founded in de-colonial and pluralizing principles, inspired in feminist empiricism, and conceived as a communication and coordinating mechanism among fragmented life experiences. I hope that the following description will be persuasive of my claim.

Advocating for a feminist understanding of situated and realist science while maintaining politically engaged, their research commits to following the trajectories of their everyday realities and develop intimate descriptions of processes in order to foster articulations. This understanding of research was deployed through their main methodological contribution —*la deriva*— the drift. This procedure was inspired in Situationism and Feminism as the best way to match to their specific circumstances. In order to reflect upon the uniqueness of this methodological tool, a little bit of description of the origin and development of the project is needed.

Based on the first part of their book *Precarias a la Deriva por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina,* one is able to follow a kind of 'research log' that situates the phases of the project. The "first babbles" of this work (as they put it) started in the context of a general strike taking place in Spain on June 20, 2002. In the space of the Eskalera Karakola, several women started to share their unease with the general call by the big labor unions to stop all production chains for 24 hours. They wanted to be part of a generalized and explicit discontent against labor conditions, but the traditional tactic of the strike assumed an ideal-type of worker that was far away from the figure of the *precaria*. Striking in the context of a per-hour contract, domestic work or self-employed job would not have any of the expected effects. Nobody would even realize it. With this frustration as their point of departure, they started to brainstorm new ways of political intervention adapted to their circumstances.

The discussion ended up with a proposal: the *piquete-encuesta*, which could be translated as the 'picket-survey'. During the day of the national strike, several small groups of women armed with cameras, recorders, notebooks and pens were dispersed throughout the city of Madrid. They aimed to hold conversations in the marginal centers of the economy where the strike made little sense: the invisible, non-regulated, un-documented, house-based sectors of the market. The main theme of the survey centered around the question *cual es tu huelga?* (what is your strike?). The survey by and of *precarias* stopped the productive *and* reproductive chain for some time and more importantly, for the long run, gave a temporary opportunity to talk among and listen to an invisible population. The exchange resulting from that day was inspiring: they opened a potential space for non-mediated encounters between unconnected women, among singular existences that at the same time, were sharing the common constraint of *precariedad* (2004: 21-22).

Based on the excitement of the results of this initial engagement, a plan for reconnecting and exploring the diversity of experiences of *precariedad* in a more systematic way started to take shape. Next, they needed research methodologies that would fit their circumstances. Looking for a procedure that would be able to capture their mobile, open-ended and contingent everyday lives, they found the inspiration in the Situationists. The situationist technique of "drifting" consists in linking different sites through random urban itineraries, developing subjective cartographies of the city. This technique seemed a pertinent option to be able to interweave settings that *precarias* inhabit but are not necessarily perceived as connected (settings such as streets, home, office, transport, supermarket, bars, union locals, etc.). *La deriva* presented itself as a perfect technique attentive to the spatial-temporal continuum that they were experiencing as *precarias*. Yet they were not completely satisfied with the situationist version, and thus developed a feminist version of drifting, a kind of *'deriva a la femme'*. Situationist researchers wander aimlessly in the city, allowing for random encounters, conversations, interaction, micro-events to be the guide of their urban itineraries. The result was a psycho-geography based on haphazard coincidences. This version though is seen as appropriate for a bourgeois male individual without commitments, and not satisfactory for a *precaria*. Instead of a random and exotic itinerary, the *precarias* version of drifting consists of a situated, directed and intentional trajectory through everyday life settings (2004: 26). This version is attached to principles such as the preeminence of everyday life activities. The personal, as source of knowledge and basis for the political, transforms the research endeavor from detached to embedded and situated observation.

Precarias a la Deriva appropriate the technique of drifting as their main research methodology. In place of the static interview, they engage with this urban expedition, which could be thought as a collective interview in motion or a mobile, itinerant, networked, cartographic kinds of ethnography, intentionally linking places inhabited in the everyday. Several *derivas* were conducted following different trajectories in multiple feminized precarious sectors such as: domestic jobs, telemarketing, translation, social nursing, sex work, art industries and communications. The *derivas* were envisioned as registers of the invisible interconnections among disperse everyday life realities. Drifting was able to capture the singularity of each trajectory, and at the same time identify shared traits among different ones. This

procedure was able to improve communication among a very fragmented population that shared the condition of *precariedad femenina*, despite the big disparity in their backgrounds and economic occupations. Communication thus was one of the main pluses of drifting. Communication was conceived not only as a tool for diffusion, but as a networking asset. This networking becomes even more important given a set of territories that make communication difficult, allowing contact and alliances to form among housekeepers, undocumented immigrants, temporary translators, sex workers, free lance researchers, fast food employees, temporary teachers, etc. The derivas permitted the discovery of a certain sense of commonality among the singularities. In that sense, communicative actions become the raw material for building political visions and actions (2004: 25). The authorship remains both collective and singular, since the research project is conducted and signed by PD but there are sections during the drift that have remained personal in the transcription to the book. The politics of authorship are conscious of how their research is being produced by a non-expert constituency but still they are explicit at claiming their place in the circumscribed realm of enunciation.

The technique of drift used by Precarias a la Deriva is not supposed to complete the challenging goal of constituting a decolonial and feminist research practice. It is an unfinished but evocative initiative that could enlarge our imagination in the search of research methodologies attuned to our principles.

Brief concluding remarks

If the project of World Anthropologies is developing a framework that goes beyond the canon of Anglo-Saxon anthropology and French-inspired theory, engaging other anthropological traditions; if this framework is said to be open to anthropological knowledge situated beyond academic geographies, then I would like to propose that some of the current research experimentation conducted by certain social movements could become possible interlocutors of WAN, and might be able to inspire potential WAN methodologies.

Imagining ethnographic practices that could capture WAN's theoretical, epistemological and political standpoints has been one of the passionate and recurrent themes in our seminar of World Anthropologies at UNC-CH during the Spring of 2005. With this introductory presentation of Precarias research methodology I hope to contribute to that collective process of enlarging the possibilities of a promising and necessary world anthropologies framework for the discipline, building non-colonial and feminist research practices.

Notes

[1] "For six years, la Karakola has served as a convergence site and point of departure for feminist thought and political action both in the neighborhood and in the far-flung feminist networks in which we participate" (author's translation) In www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias/htm .The squatted center has been threatened with eviction since Fall 2004 by the municipality of Madrid. As a response to a call for solidarity, the Social Movement Working Group at UNC-CH (among many others) sent a letter to Madrid's Department of Urbanism in order to put pressure on the city government.

[2] The translation of this term is very tricky: 'feminine casualization', 'contingent women', 'flexible girls' don't capture it. In order to be consistent to the original meaning then, I would like the reader to get acquainted to the Spanish terms. For activist references on precariousness in Europe see www.precarity.info or www.euromayday.org

[3] Information presented during the first workshop on Militant Research held at the 5th edition of the World Social Forum in January 2005 in Porto Alegre, Brasil. The presenter was part of *The Action Research Network in Europe* which is conducting "a project that aims to recover and systematize information and knowledge generated by the most recent cycle of social movements in Europe and the European Social Forum processes" according to the flyer that was passed around during the workshop. This

Catalonian activist emphasized that among the multiple activities that movements were developing; activist research was very prominent, given "the growing emergence of the intersection of research and political action".

[4] See Prologue to Nociones Comunes by Marta Malo (2004). Ed. Traficantes de Sueno. Madrid. English translation available under request.

[5] I originally envisioned expanding on three traits that I had identified held in common between WAN and Precarias. However, for the sake of this paper I will focus on the first two. I would like though to at least mention the third one: autonomy/neo-anarchism. On the one hand, I see WAN as an autonomous project, in the sense of engaging with neo-anarchist principles of being and struggle in and against institutional and power dynamics (Graeber 2004). On the other hand, I have analyzed els where the logic of political autonomy in Precarias. Their methodology consists of appropriating research mechanisms associated with authorative and totalizing representation –such as ethnographic devices- to use them in a different way, to empower social movements to speak for themselves, this is what I referred to as "autonomous ethnographies". See Maribel Casas-Cortes (2005) *From the Seminar to the Squat*. However, the recent firing of David Graeber by Yale University, has motivated me to retake this theme. How could a world anthropologies network respond to these kinds of attacks on subversive/subaltern anthropologies like anarchist anthropology? How can WAN be a sustainable project in the game of internal critic and at the same time inhabit the internal institutional geographies?

[6] For a longer description of this group see Arturo Escobar (2002). WAN follows Modernity/Coloniality's slogan of "other worlds and knowledges otherwise" calling itself as 'other anthropologies and anthropology otherwise" (Restrepo and Escobar 2005).

[7] Personal communication with Katherine Walsh December 2005

[8] Electronic communication with Walter Mignolo January 20, 2005

[9] I selected a few from the footnotes in the margins, just to give a sense of the variety of sources: P.Virno, L. Boltanski, H. Beneker and E. Wichtman on mobility; A. Macklin on immigrant domestic workers; S. Bordo on body; C. Marazzi on contemporary nature of labor; M. Sax, R. Osborne, C. Pateman, N. Fraser, E. Larrauri, C. Garaizabal on prostitution and feminism; B. Marugán, C. Vega, S. del Rio, A.P. Orozco, S. Sassen, C. Gregorio, B. Agrela, C. Catarino, L. Oso, M. Aguirre, C. Clavijo, on feminism, globalization and women; S. Giner, S. Sarasa, J. Adelantado, J. Donzelot on changes in the family structure; G. Abril, V. Sampedro, G. Imbert, J. M. Barbero, S. Hall on communication.

[10] La Eskalera Karakola edited a volume on Black, mestiza and post-colonial feminism recently. See their Prologue in *Otras Inapropiables: Feminismos desde las Fronteras* (2004) Editorial Traficantes de Suenos, Madrid.

[11] "We are precarias. This means some good things (such as accumulation of knowledges, expertise and skills through our work and existential experiences under going permanent construction), a lot of bad things (such as vulnerability, insecurity, poverty, social instability), and the majority, ambivalent things (mobility, flexibility)." (2004: 17, my translation).

[12] The concern about distributing social movements' knowledge is answered by strategies such as use of the Internet and alternative publishing houses. The publishing house for this project–*Traficantes de Sueno* and its collection *Utiles* ('Tools') -is said to be dedicated to recompile social movements' knowledges as tools of struggle. The diffusion of these knowledges is facilitated due to non copyright policies, and a license that promotes copying and non-commercial distribution with attribution. This alternative political economy publication often occurs under a regime of "Creative Commons" or 'copyleft'. See creativecommons.org

[13] I've started to analyze the epistemological, political and ontological transformations that this framework could involve. See Maribel Casas Cortes (2005) *From the Seminar to the Squat*.

[14] "Militant research is that process of reappropiation of our own capacity of world-making, which […] questions, problematizes and pushes *the real* through a series of concrete procedures"

[15] In order to rethink new models of organizing in the context of an increasing awareness of the presence of immigrant and minorities populations, they reflect on what they learn from these feminisms:"Nos invitan a identificar las especificidades de las opresiones particulares, a comprender su interconexión con otras opresiones y construir modelos de articulación política que transformen las posiciones de partida en un dialogo continuo que no renuncie a las diferencias, ni jerarquice o fije a priori posiciones unitarias y excluyentes de victimas y opresores." (Escalera Karakola ed. 2004: 17)

[16] "Our situations are so diverse, so singular, that it is difficult to find common denominators from which to depart, as well as clear differences with which we could mutually enrich each other"

[17] The question of *can there be a feminist ethnography* has been posed since the late 80s generating a rich debate about its possibilities and diverse developments (Stacey 1988, Abu-Lughod 1988, Visweswaran 1988, Gordon 1988, Wheatley 1994, Behar and Gordon 1995, Visweswaran 1997).

[18] For a good discussion of the construction of the canon and the mechanisms of exclusion based on gender see Catherine Lutz's piece "The Gender of Theory" (1995).

[19] The task of pluralizing the canon undertaken by feminist scholars is shared by the project of the World Anthropologies Network. A joint effort between WAN and Feminist Anthropology would produce a fascinating portrait of the necessary plurality within this field rescuing the work done by women or feminist ethnographers not only in the US but in Mexico, Russia, Japan, the Arab world, etc.

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