Dissertation abstract

**Keywords:** nomadism, mind-matter entanglements, poetics of change, new materialisms, nomadic subject, corporeal materiality, newness, feminism, sexual difference, poetic experiment, avant-garde, a ‘politics of location’

In my dissertation I look at the works of Mina Loy and Adrienne Rich through the lens of Rosi Braidotti’s nomadic theory in order to demonstrate that both poets developed what I consider a *poetics of change*, which is akin to “poetics searching for transformative meaning on the shoreline of what can now be thought or said” (Rich *Poetry and Commitment* 35-36), and which constitutes an expression of what Braidotti calls “becoming nomadic” (“Nomadic Ethics” 346). Inspired by the new materialist philosophy, I rethink the concept of *newness* away from the rigid definitions of the avant-garde poetics as opposed to the poetics of personal experience, grounded in identity politics, and explore the possibilities of a shared, cross-generational conversation between these two, differently *located*, poets. I argue that the *poetics of change* developed by Loy and Rich emerges as *new* not only in its formal innovativeness, but also in its capacity to flow away from the habituated – whether it is the conflict between the roles of woman and artist, fossilized misrepresentations of femininity and masculinity, or the silence around lesbian experience. It also overcomes content/form bifurcation, emphasizing instead the organic relationship between “what can now be thought or said” and how it becomes rendered in verse. Last but not least, it problematizes the mind/body dichotomy, offering a nuanced perspective on how to probe flows and interconnections between concepts “A” and “B” rather than become fixated on the disconnect.

I propose to read Loy’s and Rich’s *poetics of change* – irreducible to aesthetics – as an expression of profound shifts in consciousness. These “nomadic shifts” – to use Braidotti’s nomenclature – consist in moving away from “the socially coded modes of thought and behavior” (*Nomadic Subjects* 35-36) and “of letting go of that to which one has always held on…” (Mackenzie 2). Significantly, for both Loy and Rich a move towards *new consciousness* was by no means an attempt to develop a new kind of disembodied consciousness. On the contrary, both brought the question of bodily materiality to the forefront and anticipated a new materialist call to re-think “bodily roots of the subjectivity” (*Nomadic Subjects* 24-25). Like new materialists, Loy and Rich endeavored, although not always successfully, to overcome the split between thinking mind and sensing body. In their writings corporeality often emerges as “a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological” (*New Materialism* 33).
The four main chapters of my dissertation discuss different aspects of Loy’s and Rich’s *poetics of change* in relation to Braidotti’s nomadic theory. Chapter One traces how Loy’s nomadic consciousness, aimed at self-exploration and instigating changes, was gradually evolving and manifesting itself in her work. It demonstrates that Loy’s *poetics of change* at the time entailed deconstructing the existing gender paradigms, which enabled her to “[resist] assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self” and facilitated her “progressive metamorphoses away from the program set up in the phallogocentric format” (Briadotti *Nomadic Subjects* 12-60). Chapter Two examines Rich’s early works of self-exploration and transition. Focusing primarily on the poems spanning the years 1951-1973, it attempts to show that during that period Rich was going through a complex, and often painful, process of *disidentification*, theorized by Braidotti as “disengagement from the dominant institutions and representations of femininity and masculinity” (79). Chapter Three shows that the nomadic subject in Loy’s works is always embodied and sexually differentiated. Looking at Loy’s early and later works, it argues that she shifts from rendering the specificity of the female body to a more general question of how to think materiality in relation to consciousness. Chapter Four probes the interrelations between Rich’s *poetics of change* and the concept of *politics of location*, which Braidotti revisits in her nomadic theory, and demonstrates how the body emerges in Rich’s writing as a “geography closest in” – a primary form of the subject’s locatedness (*Blood Bread* 212). In the Coda I propose to look at Braidotti’s nomadic framework as conducive to developing dynamic modes of criticism that would probe poetic flows rather than reproduce canonized bifurcations and bring into a shared conversation those poets who are differently *located* not only in terms of aesthetics, but also gender, race or ethnicity.