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Necromasculinity

In feminist studies, it is well known that gender models change with time and context, and that the desire to become part of those models is not a 100-percent free choice, but depends, rather, on intersectional relationships of hierarchy and exclusion. However, today, when violence has become the fundamental driving force of the economies of death, it is a priority to think about masculinity and its relationship to violence and crime not as a primary or essentialist condition, but with the understanding that masculinity, as a project that governs populations, impregnates state structures.

This, which seems obvious, is not. In contrast, it is urgent that we think about this relationship of the state with masculinity and that we do this from the point of view of the analysis of its relationship with a world gender order. Connell defines this as the structure of relationships on

a world scale that connects the gender regimes of the institutions with the gender orders of local societies.¹

In this sense, the effects of these world gender order relationships, especially that of masculinity, are undoubtedly diverse. However, in Mexico's case—and perhaps we could extend this to all of Latin America because of its shared colonial history—the readjustment and changes in gender brought about by the flexibilization of labor and imposed by neoliberalism clash directly with Mexican men's gender privileges, linked to the construction of a masculinist, macho national project. This macho nation-state project was forged during the movement for independence and fostered during the post-Mexican Revolution period. Despite the fact that a century has already passed since then, different aspects of it continue to be in effect, since they have permeated the cultural, social, political, and economic imaginary, above all in men's right to use both high- and low-intensity violence as a form of personal reaffirmation. In the last two decades, it has also become a form of work and a way to acquire capital.

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This is connected to men's need to fulfill their role as providers and, thus, individually reaffirm themselves as non-redundant males in the established capitalist order. I have written elsewhere about this and the relationship of gore capitalism with young men,² emphasizing the need for an analysis of the privileges or powers of sovereignty given to males for the simple fact that they have a body that identifies them as such; the uninhibited exercise of that necropolitical power has changed society, leaving in its wake grave consequences such as the increasingly alarming increase in feminicide or the growth of organized crime in our region.

So, it is important to talk about masculinity because it is the central figure in democracies (and their lingering colonial results), which conceive of the male as a liberal, heroic, individual subject, who, when separated sharply from women, is given as privilege and bait the concession of individual rights vis-à-vis collective rights. This separation notifies us of the need to revisit the idea of the social pact founded based on a necropolitical masculinity; that is, that which has the power to kill and, therefore, govern its surroundings through lethal violence.

Hegemonic masculinity as a necropolitical cartography of government over bodies is the most deeply rooted in the West, the most difficult to disassemble, to undo, to deconstruct, because any critique of it is taken by individual men—who do not even share in the benefits of that traditional masculinity—as a critique of their selves.

This gender model, imposed as a bio/necropolitical regime, has managed to discipline and ensure the obedience of the bodies self-identified as males. Through the acritical assumption of these biopolitical ideals of masculinity, the state and the nation, founded on “naturalist” arguments, have strengthened the preservation of patriarchy as a meta-stable regime and have eliminated from the discursive map the possibility of profound self-criticism.³

Even in recent decades when studies about masculinities have been carried out, it is very rare, with honorable exceptions, that they question the depth of the relations of power and privilege that males have vis-à-vis women and with other populations considered minorities due to reasons of race, class, sexual dissidence, nationality, migratory status, or functional diversity.

For this reason, necropolitical masculinity can be understood in our analytical framework as an apparatus for implementing and preserving a project of modernity/co-

loniality and the heterosexist nation that in its transformation is linked to the expansion of the capitalist economy through the nineteenth-to-twentieth-century industrial model in our moment in history with neoliberal authoritarianism headed up by Trump but also personified by Jair Bolsonaro and other international political figures. The cult of “charismatic,” defiant, and openly misogynistic male figures is an indicator for thinking about necropolitics through its necropatriarchal representation repeated through international politics in the world democracies in the last five years.

This return to extreme conservatism, also called “patriarchal reaction,”⁴ puts male supremacy at the center of our analysis as the political cartography that is central for exercising the grimmest necropolitics that also incorporates the variables of race, class, and non-heterosexuality.⁵

In his book *Angry White Men. American Masculinity at the End of an Era*, Michel Kimmel presents a study of the white masculinities in the United States of America. Published in 2013, three years before Trump's victory, the author displays an x-ray of the masculine, white, resentful body that would give Trump his 2016 presidential win.⁶

Trump's victory can be interpreted from the standpoint of feminist studies as a form of gender, class, and racial revenge by men whose own self-perception is that they have played by the rules of the—colonial and gender—game: they have worked hard, followed the rules, and paid their taxes; they have been real men, that is, providers; and that this in their minds, has all been for naught because they're losing their gender, class, and racial privileges in a country that they believe belongs to them by right of—colonial—inheritance. Trump's victory also indicates that necromasculinity is not something reserved exclusively to racialized, impoverished men.

They experience this loss of privileges, which they confuse with rights, as their being defrauded, not by the

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capitalist system, but by the minority, intersectional populations: feminist women, Afro-descendants, the poor, undocumented immigrants, the LGBTI community.

Thus, Kimmel tells us that the feeling that brings together a variety of men who have very little in common beyond their gender and race is humiliation: “These men feel like they are seen as a failures; they are humiliated—and that humiliation is the source of their rage.... This humiliation is deeply gendered.”⁷

Here, the words “gender” and “feeling” (amplified by the feelings of “entitlement and sense of victimization”) are fundamental for the propagation of conservative ideals.⁸ This is because it is in the dimension of feelings (understood as a framework of perception and the piecing together of reality) where the most insidious forms of production of fake consensuses or silent consensuses are forged,⁹ disseminated at unstoppable speeds through social media, configuring a regressive sensibility.

This sensibility acts at a pre-reflexive level, based on emotions, since, as we know, sensibility is “the faculty of exchanging meaning without using words, the condition of empathetic understanding. This faculty is what shapes everyday life and offers mutual understanding in a community.”¹⁰

The regressive sensibility is characterized by the desire for “a life of rights,” as Argentinean philosopher Silvia Scharbock calls it in her book *Los espectros* (The Specters). That is, the desire for a life that subscribes to fascism 2.0, not as a strong ideology, but as a reduction of the conservative pulsations toward what critical thought has defined as the “authoritarian personality”: a mix of fear and frustration and a lack of self-confidence that leads to the enjoyment of one’s own submission.

In our day, this regressive sensibility is crystalized in the strengthening of gender binarism; the rise of religious fanaticism in politics; the criminalization of abortion; the defense of the white, heterosexual nation; and the overwhelming growth of xenophobia throughout our hemisphere and the whole world.

This regressive sensibility brings together both recalcitrant machismo, racist arguments, and the anti-immigrant nationalist discourse, joined intergenerationally in the most conservative wing of the U.S. social movements, but also those of countries like Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Venezuela. They take up the old ultra-right supremacist ideas, updating them through racist, misogynist

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ynist youths who populate the Alt-Right in the United States and the regenerated right wing of large regions of the hemisphere who use digital folklore to disseminate conspiracy theories and ideas about victimization in favor of the ultra-right agenda.¹¹

In this way, the new “alternative” extreme right wing builds communities of affinity using incendiary tweets, fake news, and mounting “alternative versions of reality.” To do this they use the historic discourses that seek social justice for the majority of the population, emptying them of all content by twisting them and appropriating their grammar of resistance. For example, they do this by discrediting women’s accusations of sexual abuse through the #MeToo movement, positioning the hashtag #NotAllMen. Or, they appropriate and de-contextualize the movement slogan #BlackLivesMatter, turning it into #All-LivesMatter.

Another significant characteristic of this kind of conservatism is that it has a broad spectrum; that is, it mobilizes toward other sectors that do not consider themselves exactly conservative; it spreads its net by bringing in different groups from other political and non-political currents that share certain degrees of indignation about the advances of historically vulnerable groups like women, immigrants, Afro-descendants, and Native American peoples, and positions itself against those advances. In this sense, it is concerning that groups that are not ultra-conservative but rather support supposedly progressive imaginaries become complacent about the benefits and privileges they receive through these policies that criminalize the other.

Thus, the U.S. and international right wing has become unusually strong in recent years because “it is made up by a not-always-reconcilable swarm of managers, technocrats, opulent financial capitalists, and more or less



dispossessed monotheists. It oscillates between a futuristic logic that pushes the stock market machine toward profit and the repressive retreat toward the social body that reaffirms the border and family links as enclaves of sovereignty.”¹²

This cult of traditional masculinity as the triumph of the most aggressive, necromasculine virility is no minor matter. Quite to the contrary, it is the cornerstone for the expansion of necropolitics in the entire hemisphere. One example of this necropolitics can clearly be seen in the increase in feminicide throughout Latin America, but also in the United States and Canada.

The rise in macho necropolitics as a form of managing populations through their elimination of women is a return to feudal/colonial policies of expropriation of women’s bodies, knowledge, and territory carried out in Europe and the United States in the period known as the witch hunts.¹³ In our regions of the South, this was carried out as massacres of women and first peoples and/or female defenders of territory.

In our day, this extermination of women can be understood as a gender necropolitics breathed into life by low- and high-intensity misogynist discourses. In certain cases, these have spurred the organization of furious men who have politicized their hatred of women and formed a kind

of anti-feminist activism using the argument that they are defending men’s rights or groups of involuntary celibates (incels) who use the anonymity of social media to create online communities where they express their resentment.

In this sense, “the density of the masculine depends on its semiotic magnitude. Masculinity as a gender category is produced culturally, not only as a perceivable entity, but also as an apparatus of perception; it is an instrument through which we can know the particularities of a nation’s culture.”¹⁴

Thus, necromasculinity as a political cartography, and not just an individual body, is a social phenomenon linked to work, violence, and oppression, as a way of providing continuity to the social and economic hegemonic projects that weave the necropolitical with the biopolitical regimes through the Enlightenment-oriented democracy and the “heterosexual nation,” in the words of Ochy Curiel. For this reason, the biggest challenge for men today is the invention of other narratives and other social practices that can help them to articulate a dissident masculinity that breaks with macho, necropolitical masculinity as the only option. ■■

Notes

- 1 R. W. Connell, *Masculinidades* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2003).
- 2 Sayak Valencia, *Capitalismo Gore* (Barcelona: Melusina, 2010). And also Valencia, 2013, 2014, 2016.
- 3 Celia Amorós, *La gran diferencia y sus pequeñas consecuencias... para las luchas de las mujeres* (Barcelona: Cátedra, 2005).
- 4 Marta Cabezas and Cristina Vega, eds., *La reacción patriarcal. Neoliberalismo autoritario, politización religiosa y nuevas derechas* (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2022).
- 5 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolítica* (Barcelona: Melusina, 2011).
- 6 Michel Kimmel, *Hombres (blancos) cabreados* (Valencia: Balín Libros, 2019).
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Franco Berardi, *Fenomenología del Fin* (Buenos Aires: Caja Negra, 2017).
- 10 Franco Berardi, “Prólogo,” in Irmgard Emmelhainz, *La tiranía del sentido común. La reconversión neoliberal de México* (Mexico City: Paradiso Ediciones, 2016).
- 11 Jaron Rowan, “Memes: Inteligencia idiota, política rara y folclore digital” (Madrid: Capitán Swing Libros, 2015).
- 12 Paul B. Preciado, “Decimos revolución,” prologue to Miriam Solá and Elena/Urko, eds. *Transfeminismos. Epistemes, fricciones y flujos* (Tafalla, Navarre, Spanish State: Txalaparta, 2013).
- 13 Silvia Federici, “Calibán y la bruja. Mujeres, cuerpo y acumulación originaria,” *Revista Latinoamericana de Antropología del Trabajo*, 2010.
- 14 Héctor Domínguez, *De la sensualidad a la violencia de género. La modernidad y la nación en las representaciones de la masculinidad en el México contemporáneo* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 2013).

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