

*Nuestro lugar de enunciación viene de otra historia, de otra genealogía; se trata de una intertextualidad que nos pertenece, tejida por las mujeres insolentes y pensantes y algunas otras rescatables que las circundan. Es un lugar conectado a la vida, a nuestra vida, a nuestros cuerpos históricos; consiste en una parcialidad honesta y pronunciada.*

—Andrea Franulic, “*Un largo etcétera*”

*My thinking grew directly out of listening to my own discomforts, finding out who shared them, who validated them, and in exchanging stories about common experiences, finding patterns, systems, explanations of how and why things happened. This is the central process of consciousness raising, of collective testimonio. This is how homemade theory happens.*

—Aurora Levins Morales, “*Certified Organic Intellectual*”

## CONSTRUYENDO COMPLICADADES, RESPALDANDO RESISTENCIAS: A Roundtable Discussion on Institutional Violence in Latin American Universities

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*A few years ago,* I had dinner in Mexico City with a Latina feminist from New York City. A Fulbright recipient, she had enrolled in two courses at the Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género (PUEG), one of the many institutes at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), but their Eurocentrism alienated her. She stopped attending.

Weeks later, I visited the PUEG's extensive library, la Biblioteca Rosario Castellanos. Seeking a better understanding of decolonial Mexican feminist formations, I combed their shelves and their catalog, but came up empty-handed. While I found dozens of volumes by Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and other queer theorists who "police the queer person of color with theory" through their use of "approaches, styles, and methodologies that are Anglo-American or European," texts by Chicana and Latina feminists were notably scarce (Anzaldúa 2009, 165). Instead, I encountered numerous works by those whom Chela Sandoval labels "hegemonic feminist scholars": authors whose theories "legitimate certain modes of culture, consciousness, and practice, only to systematically curtail the forms of experiential and theoretical articulations expressed by... oppositional activists" (2000, 47).

That visit gave me an initial glimpse at the extent to which discursive colonization, a concept theorized by Chandra Talpade Mohanty and elaborated upon by several Latin American feminists, shapes Latin American gender studies programs (2003, 17). Indeed, although the PUEG has started to appropriate the work of prominent Chicana feminists—in an apparent tribute to Cherríe Moraga and to the late Gloria E. Anzaldúa, the institute named its annual colloquium on race, gender, and sexuality "Las Güeras y las Prietas"—many of its initiatives reflect the "add and stir" method that many Chicana/Latina feminists critique. Following Norma Alarcón, Aimee Carrillo Rowe points out that "efforts to merely add women writers of color to feminist theoretical production are inadequate to shift the epistemological categories of feminism" (2008, 135).

In 2011, the PUEG's Coloquio Anual de Estudios de Género reflected a mode of feminist thought steeped in masculinist and Eurocentric approaches, exclusionary logics, and the tokenizing "add and stir" method. Although the program

featured one talk by a Chicana feminist, her presentation hardly destabilized the colloquium's focus. The event began with a keynote by the North American queer theorist David Halperin, "How to Be Gay: Other Ways of Being/Feeling." The fact that the title of his talk appeared in the program in English betrayed the exclusionary logic informing the colloquium. Meanwhile, a simple scan of the papers presented at the colloquium hinted at the PUEG's political project: while the words *género*, *gay*, and *queer* appeared repeatedly, *mujeres* appeared only twice. The terms *feminismo* and *feminista* were entirely absent.

Ultimately, the PUEG's work reminds me of the political costs of the institutionalization of feminist theorizing, as well as of the perils of discursive colonization. Indeed, it calls to mind Aurora Levins Morales's astute words:

In the marketplace of ideas, we are pushed toward the supermarket chains that are replacing the tiny rural *colmado*; told that storebought is better, imported is best, and sold on empty calories in shiny packaging instead of open crates and barrels of produce to which the earth still clings. (2001, 27)

*Imported is best.* This is the attitude with which many Mexicana feminists, including those affiliated with the PUEG, seem to have greeted Mexico City's *Marcha de las Putas*. Held in June of 2011, it represented a local incarnation of the global SlutWalk phenomenon, which originated in Toronto in April of 2011.

In the United States, many women of color spoke out against the SlutWalks as an expression of "exclusionary U.S. hegemonic feminism," to borrow a phrase from Sandoval (2000, 47).<sup>1</sup> In Mexico, however, powerful feminist academics celebrated *la Marcha de las Putas* and the efforts of its Mexicana organizers, without attending to the race- and class-based privileges that contributed to the visibility of their work. Politically, *la Marcha de las Putas* exemplified Levins

Morales's "empty calories in shiny packaging": it gave young women an excuse to put on high heels and paint their chests with flimsy slogans like "yo escojo con quién cojo." Nonetheless, Marta Lamas, a gender studies professor at the UNAM and the director of the prominent journal *Debate feminista*, went on the Mexico City talk show circuit, touting the significance of SlutWalk's presence in cities across Mexico. In doing so, Lamas and other academics made clear "la complicidad del feminismo hegemónico local con lo que sería la perpetuación de la ideología euronorcéntrica" (Espinosa Miñoso 2009, 44). In this case, Lamas's comments on Mexican television revealed the extent to which the UNAM's gender studies program too often perpetuates the discursive colonization of Latin American feminist thought, by legitimating the importation of Anglo feminisms.

In Mexico City and other Latin American urban centers, certain modes of feminism have gained legitimacy and visibility vis-à-vis neoliberal reforms and institutionalization. These iterations of feminist thought have not only perpetuated discursive colonization: they have also profoundly shaped power relations between academic institutions and grassroots movements, further disempowering subaltern feminists (Espinosa Miñoso 2011; Hernández Castillo 2008; Pisano 2001). For instance, while prominent academic feminists publicly voiced their support of the 2011 *Marcha de las Putas*, they also attempted to discredit a grassroots feminist mobilization that emerged in Mexico, rather than in Canada: the *Marcha Lésbica*.

An autonomous, lesbian-feminist march, the Mexico City *Marcha Lésbica* originated in 2003 as an alternative to the local gay pride parade, which has become increasingly commercialized and depoliticized over the course of its thirty-five-year history. Over the past decade, its organizers have forged a coalitional movement to protest structural violence against women and lesbians, despite the Mexican state's authoritarian efforts to silence its opposition—a campaign that has only intensified since President Felipe Calderón launched the ongoing

“narcoguerra” in 2006 (Fregoso 2003, 53). Yet the working-class Mexicanas spearheading the march have also had to contend with institutional violence incited by the economically- and politically-powerful academics that find their critiques inconvenient. They include Gloria Careaga, the co-founder and former director of the PUEG. When I interviewed her in June of 2011, she accused Marcha Lésbica organizers of intolerance and separatism (Careaga 2011). Ultimately, Careaga figures among those who actively participate in “el proyecto que hace imposible la agencia y la escucha de la subalterna latinoamericana” (Espinosa Miñoso 2009, 47).

This silencing of subaltern feminisms has produced significant antipathy not only toward marginalized, oppositional activists, but also toward those who ground their theorizing in the lived experiences of indigenous, Afro-Latina, lesbian, poor, working-class, radical, and migrant women—especially those who defy masculinist and Eurocentric conventions in their writings and citational practices. In many cases, feminists studying in Latin American universities, even those enrolled in women’s and gender studies programs, have found their colleagues unwilling to recognize “que existen otros lenguajes, no academizados, no colonizadores,” as one mexicana graduate student in women’s studies told me (Vergara Sánchez 2013). As a result, feminists wishing to advance non-hegemonic consciousness learn to disfrazar, or camouflage, their theories and methods, deploying the language of hegemonic feminist thought in order to bring to fruition their transformational projects.

As Chicana and Latina feminists committed to transnational, decolonial feminist praxes, we have much to learn from how Latin American feminists navigate the interplay between discursive colonization and institutional violence. (See Figure 1: *Mujer dividida* for a visual metaphor.) As such, I invited four feminist compañeras to participate in a roundtable discussion via Skype on heteropatriarchal institutional violence in Latin American universities. They