TESTIMONIANDO Y COMADREANDO ACROSS BORDERS: Latina/s Anónima/s in *Telling To Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*

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Abstract: This article examines the ways in which The Latina Feminist Group, or TLFG, challenges the problems that can emerge in traversing Latina feminist discourses and epistemologies across the Americas and the development of true solidarities by creating a transnational and translocal anonymous narrating subject in their collection *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001): the Latina Anónima. To this end, this essay argues that the Latina Anónima emerges from a process of cultural translation and translenguaje, which are mediated by friendships (Alvarez et al. 2014). TLFG's collective engagement with these translational political practices through testimonio methodology enables their cross-border theorization of Latinidad/es and the forging of political transnational and translocal friendships and comadreo.

Feminist Latina scholarship has emphasized the crucial need to engage in a "translocal feminist translational politics" across geopolitical and theoretical borders to facilitate the development of feminist decolonial solidarities and epistemologies (Lima Costa and Alvarez 2014, 558). The need for a feminist translational praxis can be seen in the ways in which certain concepts, theories, and feminist practices do not translate well across borders because their sociocultural, historical, and geopolitical meanings are lost when they encounter what Claudia de Lima Costa defines as different "roadblocks and migratory checkpoints" (2014, 20). An example illustrative of the effects of these roadblocks is the U.S. political label "woman of color," which does not translate well in Latin American countries such as Brazil due to different understandings of race color, and identity categories beyond the strict "U.S. black and white" model (Lima Costa 2014, 20-21; Gilliam 2016, 99).[1] This

often leads to a (mis)translation of woman of color as a biological category rather than a political project—a depoliticization that also affects categories like LGBT or queer[2] (Blackwell 2014, 317; Bueno-Hansen 2014, 326). This (mis) translation highlights the import of the politics of location in the development of these categories and complicates the transborder development of women of color feminisms.[3] This is indeed demonstrated by "the tepid response of Latin American feminists to the Spanish translation of *This Bridge, Esta Puente, Mi Espalda* (Moraga and Castillo 1988)—which did not speak directly to the racial, class, and sexual formations of women across borders" (Blackwell 2014, 305), or the resistance to Chicana and Latina feminisms in Latin America, where Chicana/Latina concerns are sometimes seen as irrelevant (Lima Costa 2014, 21; Sampaio 2002). The effects of these roadblocks also become evident if we consider recent debates against the gender neutral coalitional term Latinx—which is also primarily used in the U.S.—and where the x is often seen as a form of linguistic imperialism that alienates Spanish-speaking Latinas/os/xs (Guerra and Orbea 2015; de Onís 2017).

In this context, and in the eve of the twentieth anniversary of *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001), this article examines the ways in which The Latina Feminist Group, or TLFG,[4] confronts the problems that can arise in the traversing of Latina feminist discourses and epistemologies across the Americas and develops true solidarities by creating a transnational and translocal anonymous narrating subject: the Latina Anónima. I argue that the Latina Anónima emerges because the members of TLFG engage in a translational political praxis—as defined by Sonia Alvarez, Maylei Blackwell, Pascha Bueno-Hansen, and Claudia de Lima Costa (2014) in their groundbreaking study of the transmigration of feminist practices and discourses across the Latin/a Américas through a process of cultural translation and the consequential shaping of translenguaje and alternative solidarities, or, friendships and comadreo.

Telling to Live is a collection of testimonios from eighteen Latinas who form TLFG and who engage in testimonio to theorize the complexity of Latinidad/es. In doing so, TLFG uses the Latina label as "a coalitional term," and explains that their "use of the Latina label builds on its emergence in coalitional politics in the U.S. and signifies our connections through praxis to the rest of the Americas and other multiple geographies of origin" (6). In doing so, TLFG disrupts essentialist constructions of Latina identity and experience by conceptualizing Latina identities beyond nationality or ethnicity markers and acknowledging the importance of heritage, culture, religious-spiritual formation, class, generation, political orientation, and linguistic heritage and practice (5-7).[5] Out of the sixty-four testimonios shaping *Telling to Live*, ten are presented as anonymous. Signed by "Latina Anónima," and voicing stories of institutional, domestic, and sexual violence, TLFG explains that these testimonios are illustrative of "experiences that can and do happen to any Latina" (14), thus allowing them to voice the complexity of Latinidad/es and create alliances while foregrounding their individualities. As a narrator grounded in TLFG's coalitional use of the Latina label as well as their collective trauma of *experiencing* and *narrating* their abusive experiences through testimonio, I posit that the Latina Anónima embodies an individual, yet collective, transnational and translocal anonymous narrating subject who enables TLFG's cross border theorization of Latinidad/es while forging transborder solidarities. TLFG conceives these solidarities in terms of friendships and comadreo, which is "the Latin American/Latina tradition of kinship, reciprocity, and commitment" that creates a community by forging reciprocal and communal bonds (15). In doing so, the Latina Anónima further develops the ways in which Latina feminists can confront the barriers that may arise in the traversing of Latina feminisms across the Americas, and fosters the shaping of a consciousness of resistance and a coalitional speech for Latinas and women of color.

A Transborder Translation of the Translocal Self

The testimonios in *Telling to Live* were collected over the course of seven years through a collective and consensual process (12). Therefore, even though TLFG's testimonial practices incorporated oral ritual with transcriptions, revisions, and the necessary negotiations for their translational political praxis, the final product that TLFG presents is an already negotiated notion of Latinidad/es, and thusly, of the Latina Anónima. Furthermore, TLFG explains that their "geographic migrations enabled us to create a network […] on which to reconceptualize Latinidad, as we could relate to the struggles of women in other Latino contexts" (9). This network not only challenges essentialist constructions of Latina identity by embracing Latinas and Latinamericanas, but also highlights the fact that Latinidad/es is both translocal—which indicates the movement across and within one's multiple subjectivities and politics of location—and transnational because borders do not only exist across nations (Alvarez et al. 2014).

Along this path, I will refer to U.S. Latina women with the term Latina/s, and Latin American women with the word *Latinamericana/s*. My use of the word Latinamericana derives from the Spanish word Latinoamericana. By coining the word Latinamericana, my goal is to contribute to Latinas' decolonization of hegemonic constructions of Latina subjectivities by censuring the patriarchal character of the Latinoamericano/a label and the "linguistic borderland" (Anzaldúa 2007) constructed through the imposed English/Spanish binary. It is therefore important to note that my goal in using the label *Latinamericana* is not to erase the differences between Latinas and Latinamericanas, but rather to underscore Latina feminists' shifting positionalities and how they affect the negotiation of vectors of power, meanings, discourses, and identities. This approach thereby highlights the

transnational and translocal network TLFG creates through testimonio while still adding a difference to the coalitional stem-label "Latina."

Bueno-Hansen defines cultural translation as a practice of mediation across geo-political, discursive, and linguistic borders and power relations (2014). Since cultural translation requires a process of negotiations across vectors of power, meanings, discourses, and identities, it encourages the building of political alliances, and is indeed crucial for the development of feminist solidarities based on an understanding and appreciation of difference. The negotiations involved in the process of cultural translation shape a translenguaje. According to Blackwell, translenguaje allows the crossborder translation of political projects, discourses, and identities, and works towards the transformation of meanings without erasing difference (2014). Furthermore, Blackwell explains that a translengua urges the development of political projects by rewriting meanings and identities across different local contexts. This is because local power relations are immediately related to processes of globalization and transnational movements, and also explains the need for a politics of translation to be both transnational and translocal. Translenguaje requires the understanding of each other's histories through a process of cultural translation, but also of how those histories shape one's ability to speak in certain positions. In doing so, translenguaje enacts what Ruth Trinidad Galván defines as a "glocal perspective": a viewpoint that, by recognizing the ways local knowledges impact global ones, urges us to disrupt the North/South divide and form global alliances (2014). Therefore, translenguaje facilitates the traveling of identities across translocal and transnational locations and migratory checkpoints, and encouraging the negotiation, rather than erasure, of power relations. Ultimately, translenguaje does not privilege certain modes of thinking or identity markers; instead, translenguaje contemplates, validates, and appreciates difference, and fosters

coalitions and friendships across different sociocultural and geopolitical locations and spaces—a glocal, transnational and translocal network.

TLFG's practices of cultural translation and translenguaje are mediated by friendship, a political model of solidarity based on mutual collaboration and validation of difference (Bueno-Hansen 2014; TLFG 2001). As mentioned above, TLFG explains that their collective bearing witness creates comadreo,[6] a sociocultural and political practice that characterizes close relationships between members of the Latina and Latinamericana communities and that also encourages an alternative model of solidarity. The call for an alternative model of solidarity responds to the critique that a politics of solidarity based on sisterhoods supports an ethnocentric agenda by trying to avoid conflicts and disagreements (Lugones and Rosezelle 1995; TLFG 2001). But TLFG did have moments of dissent. Furthermore, in her testimonio titled "Speaking Among Friends: Whose Empowerment, Whose Resistance?," Luz del Alba Acevedo acknowledges that "power relations did emerge in our Latina feminist group, but these nudos de poder (nodes of power) could be loosened and united through a process of collaboration and polyphonic negotiation of difference without compromising the validation, understanding, and affirmation of diversity" (261). In other words, the practices of cultural translation and translenguaje enabled TLFG's negotiation and coalitional theorization of Latinidad/es and the consequent shaping of a politics of friendships and comadreo, of which the Latina Anónima is one key example.

Understanding the ways in which TLFG engages with cultural translation, translenguaje, and friendship is crucial because these translational practices have characterized the development of coalitions between civil rights and national liberation movements, and have encouraged the shaping of political communities of resistance and subjectivity—a woman of color subjectivity/ies

(Blackwell 2014). In addition, cultural translation and translenguaje empowered the building of the political category women of color in the U.S., collaborative efforts that were necessary for the later publication of *This Bridge Called My Back* (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981). This collection has been groundbreaking for Latina and women of color feminisms and is indeed an inspiration for *Telling to Live* (TLFG 2001), which has even been defined as the twenty-first century rendition of *This Bridge* (Saldívar-Hull 2005). Indeed, published twenty years after *This Bridge*, *Telling to Live* has inspired Latina feminists to incorporate testimonio into their scholarly and pedagogical practices (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga and Flores 2012; Saavedra and Salazar Pérez 2013, 2014). Nonetheless, when scholars mark the starting point of women of color feminism with the publication of *This Bridge*, they fail to account for the coalitional identities developed at least a decade before the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the rich and crucial genealogy of feminist efforts shaping Latina and women of color feminisms (Blackwell 2014; Bueno-Hansen 2014). Moreover, scholars like Alvarez, Blackwell, Bueno-Hansen, and Lima Costa (2014) lament the cross border (miss)translation of *This Bridge* mentioned above and, how these hinder the development of feminist coalitions across the Américas. Continuing the feminist political work of *This Bridge*, TLFG's Latina Anónima defies these challenges by performing a politics of translation through testimonio—an anonymous narrating subject whose collective and anonymous body disrupts and heals the north/south divide separating Latinas and Latinamericanas.

Re/constructing Testimonio

Invoking life writing scholarship (Beverley 2008; Harlow 1996), TLFG defines testimonio "as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere" (13). Therefore, TLFG explains, testimonios have often been

seen as "dependent products" whereby the marginalized "assert themselves as political subjects […] and in the process emphasize particular aspects of their collective identity" (13). This antiauthoritarian relationship between the narrator and the ethnographer (Harlow 1996) is important because, given that TFLG describes themselves as "professional *testimoniadoras*" (2001, 2), *Telling to Live* adapts to, yet challenges, the use of testimonio by those who are at the margins of society. By describing themselves as "professional testimoniadoras," TLFG admits their professional privilege, but they also censure their marginality as Latina feminists in academia. And by using testimonio as a method to theorize their experiences and turn them into theories—an enactment of the theories of the flesh (Anzaldúa and Moraga 1981; TLFG 2001)—TLFG condemns the limiting character of traditional scholarly approaches where their experience is devalued, laying the methodological groundwork for Latina feminists' use of testimonio as a feminist research method and methodology. Turning personal experience into a source of knowledge, testimonio breaks the constraining theory/experience, mind/body binary systems that govern academia, and exposes and censures the close relationship between the shaping of hegemonic knowledges, power, and colonialism (Córdova 1998; Cruz 2006; Delgado Bernal, Burciaga and Flores 2012).

Despite their deviation from canonical understandings of testimonio, TLFG views *Telling to Live* as "closer to the genre of testimonio" not only because their rhetorical practices "follow a common process of generating testimonio," but also because, following the Latin American practice, their testimonios do not express an individualistic subjectivity but rather "express multiple subjectivities of individual lives, marked by uniqueness as well as shared history and context" in which the TLFG "are exploring the ways in which [their] individual identities express the complexities of [their] communities as a whole" (20-21). Additionally,

TLFG explains that the goal of providing an explanation of how *Telling to Live* came to be is not only to emphasize the important role testimonio plays for their articulation of Latina feminist epistemologies, but also to foreground the fundamental role of the community in the shaping of their Latina subjectivities (8). The individual-collective character of testimonio underlines the sociopolitical character of the narration as well as the ways in which testimonial practices can encourage coalitions between and among the members of a particular community. As TLFG's collective use of testimonio bears witness to the embodied experiences of the narrating "I" and creates connections with her collectives, this narrative process shapes a transnational and translocal network among and between Latinas and Latinamericanas.

Importantly, TLFG explains that the Latina Anónima emerges as TLFG seeks to identify the role that "collectivity" and "isolation" have played in their lives, and to discuss tactics of "resistance" and "recovery" that they have developed to combat their traumatic experiences of institutional and personal abuse (14). Unveiling these testimonios enacts a "healing process," turning the Latina Anónima into a source of empowerment despite its painful roots (14). Furthermore, it is important to note that these anonymous testimonios are signed by a singular Latina Anónima, rather than a plural group of Latinas Anónimas. The anonymous narrating "I" is presented in individualistic terms, but since the Latina voices experiences "that can and do happen to any [coalitional] Latina" (14), she is posited as representative of a collective subject who, following the genre of testimonio, extends beyond TLFG by embracing other Latinas and Latinamericanas: a collective subject of Latinas Anónimas. The Latina/s Anónima/s become/s another participant subject of TLFG's collective testimonial practices; a narrator who is representative of the collectives and networks embraced by TLFG's coalitional transnational and translocal conceptualization of Latinidad/es. She is presented as a singular Latina Anónima,

but she is also the embodiment of many other Latinas Anónimas; an illustration of Latinas' complex subjectivities, and their translocality and transnationality, as they are forced to constantly translate themselves across geopolitical, linguistic, and sociocultural borders (Alvarez et al. 2014).

Indeed, TLFG explains their testimonio as a translation of the self to one another, but also as a collaborative reciprocal process that aims to cross borders (11). TLFG's view of testimonio as a translation of the self is particularly important given the crucial need to engage and develop a feminist translational politics across geopolitical and theoretical borders to enable the development of transnational and translocal forms of solidarities. By performing cultural translation, translenguaje, and friendship/comadreo between Latinas and Latinamericanas, the Latina Anónima disrupts and interrogates the boundaries established between North/South America. Through her anonymous individual/collective character, the Latina Anónima disturbs hegemonic understandings of national identity, geopolitical boundaries, and cultural divides and defies essentialist readings of Latina and Latinamericana identities and experiences.

Besides TLFG's reclaiming of the testimonio genre and their coalitional theorization of Latinidad/es there are other aspects of *Telling to Live* that reveal the transnational, translocal, and glocal character of TLFG's testimonial practices and crafting of the Latina Anónima. As TLFG reclaims the Latin American practice of testimonio, they also disrupt Western forms of life writing and the objectifications of the testimonial genre, the narrating subject(s), and their collectives (Beverley 2008; Bañales 2014). Furthermore, *Telling to Live* is published as part of the series "Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations," which seeks to further the study and theorization of the multiple intersections developed across the Americas (ix). TLFG contributes to these series by theorizing the intersectionality of their identities and the knowledges

derived from their Latinidad/es. In this way, TLFG stresses the importance of developing connections across the Americas, not only by challenging traditional uses of testimonio, but also by participating in a series that seeks to decolonize hegemonic definitions and knowledges of/from/about Latin America. This rhetorical and political work is further achieved as TLFG refuses to adapt to Standard English or Spanish; instead, TLFG decides to embrace, and not always translate, the multiple languages they use thorough their testimonial practices. These languages are not only reflective of the members of TLFG's complex heritages (8), but also of the constant processes of translation they are enforced to engage as transnational and translocal subjects.

Therefore, while it may seem that, as a collective yet individualistic subject, the Latina Anónima challenges the importance of the positionality and intersectionality of identity, her anonymous character emphasizes the oppressive and restrictive nature of Western construction of identity labels and its imposition of boundary lines (Anzaldúa 1990). When we read the Latina Anónima testimonios, we do not know the identity markers or positionalities defining the narrating subject, other than the fact that she identifies with the coalitional Latina label. As we read these anonymous testimonios, we may ask: Who is the anonymous narrator and where is/are she/they located? Is the Latina Anónima in this testimonio the same narrator we find in the previous/next anonymous subject? Does the Latina Anónima give voice to one specific story, or is this story a combination of various experiences? In probing these questions, we need to emphasize the Latina Anónima's identification with TLFG's coalitional *Latina* as well as the fact that TLFG has crafted the Latina Anónima and reclaimed the genre of testimonio to reflect on and heal from their traumatic experiences together with their individual and collective identities. In doing so, the Latina Anónima constructs a complex transnational and translocal Latina glocal form/s of subjectivity/ies and rhetoric of friendship

and comadreo that allows theorization of the complexity of Latinidad/es and fosters solidarities across borders.

Latina/s Anónima/s

Telling to Live features a total of sixty-four testimonios which are distributed among four sections, and which TLFG describes these as "round[s] of testimonio" because each section seeks to address different questions (13). Thus, the structural division of *Telling to Live* is not reflective of the "topics" dealt with, nor the nature of the incidents recounted. Instead, the motivations to voice TLFG's testimonios and the knowledges derived from the narrated experiences mark the structure of the collection—for *experience* is key to the complex unveiling and theorization of Latinidad/es. In the first section, entitled "Genealogies of Empowerment," TLFG contemplates their complex identities; they examine the effects of their communities in their personal, academic, and professional growth, and how these have shaped their articulation of theories developed through the contemplation of experience. This is a theme that resonates throughout the whole collection, but becomes a major topic shaping the first section. There are no anonymous testimonios in this first section because the Latina Anónima emerged during the second round of testimonios, after TLFG had contemplated the complexities of their identities and strengthened their sense of solidarity with each other (2001).

Most of the anonymous testimonios (six out of the ten anonymous testimonios presented in the whole collection) are in the second section, where the Latina Anónima emerged. This section is titled "Alchemies of Erasure" because, TLFG explains, this section presents painful experiences which had not yet been told and which TLFG unveils to make sense of their experiences of oppression and trauma. The Latina/s Anónima/s in this section, whose testimonios I will

analyze below, condemn experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional violence, both personal and institutional. For example, Latinas' marginalization in academia is a major theme in "Between Perfection and Invisibility," "Welcome to the Ivory Tower," and "Don't You Like Being in the University?," and precisely what motivated TLFG's testimonial practices in the first place when they first met "to discuss our concerns as Latina feminists in higher education and to consider possibilities for doing collaborative work" (2001, 1). By telling and theorizing their experiences with institutional racism and sexism, TLFG reflects on the ways in which the Academy "require[s] 'professionalism,' 'objectivity,' and 'respectability' in ways that often negate our humanity" (2001, 14). In other words, with these testimonios, TLFG censures and interrupts the Western binaries established between theory and experience, and the mind and body, as these canonical dichotomies render Latinas and women of color invisible.

This invisibility and fragmentation is specifically condemned in "Between Perfection and Invisibility" where, as the Latina Anónima begins her doctoral studies, the imposition of Western forms of knowledge "numb[s]" her body (2001, 207). This is an experience that is not new to her, because she also lived it both when she first went to kindergarten and when she went to college. In kindergarten, the Latina Anónima was suddenly immersed in the English language, a language she did not comprehend since only Spanish was spoken at her home. The Latina Anónima lived this experience of erasure once again in college since the educational system in her little town had not prepared her well for "the urban university," nor for the racial, gender, and class struggles she would go through at a predominantly white institution (2001, 210-11). The linguistic struggles she suffered as a child are different now that she is in graduate school, yet equally painful: "The linguistic sounds I heard were suspiciously incomprehensible. The nuanced articulations of the white middle-class students felt like bricks thrown at my face. The bruises silenced me once

more. I felt split, dismembered" (210). Latinas' constant need to translate themselves across different places and spaces highlights how this testimonio voices the experiences of many other Latinas/os/xs, regardless of the languages they speak. Furthermore, the Latina Anónima condemns the ways in which institutional ideologies fragment her body, while her testimonio empowers her re/construction of her individuality, and emphasizes the need to mediate between language, cultural systems, and power relations. By foregrounding the impact of language and Eurocentric discourses in her embodied experiences, the Latina Anónima emphasizes the important role cultural translation, translenguaje, lived experience, and political commitment play in the shaping of coalitional Latinidad/es and the crafting of a rhetorical subject who can cross transnational and translocal borders without altering meaning.

The Latina Anónima also appears in the third section, titled "The Body Re/Members," and in three testimonios: "Night Terrors," "La Princesa," and "Let Me Sleep." This third round of testimonios mainly focuses on the ways in which TLFG's experiences of abuse are inscribed within their bodies, turning the body into a site of knowledge and political praxis, and emphasizing how their experiences of physical and emotional abuse are inscribed within a collectivity of Latina bodies. Foregrounding their embodied experiences, TLFG narrate their testimonios as stories emerging from their bodies, engaging in a process of de/construction—a de/construction marked with the titled "Re/members," as TLFG 'remember' their experiences, but also dis-member and re-member their bodies through the testimonial act. This de/constructive process illustrates the ways in which TLFG turns their testimonio into a healing practice that re-constructs the body without falling into the fragmentation that Western discourses exert upon the body with the Cartesian binaries established between mind/body and theory/experience (Anzaldúa 2015, 1990; Cruz 2006).

For example, in "Night Terrors," the narrator tells of the sexual violation she suffered at the hands of her father and a friend of her father. The narrator explicitly condemns both sexual and domestic violence, and the silence enforced by rape culture as it stigmatizes the violated body. Even though the rapist was finally convicted, the narrator laments that she is the one who is blamed and she laments, "I knew that any dreams I had of marriage in white were ruined—no man would want someone who had been used" (282). When she went to court to press charges against her father's friend, she went through what is described as "the second rape"; actually, she adds, "I endured several assaults" (TLFG 2001, 278). The Latina Anónima had to tell her experience several times, go through the physical exam, and answer questions blaming her for what had happened: "Did you know him, M'ija? Was he your boyfriend?" (283). Among the many questions the attorney asked at the trial, they inquired if she had ever seen a penis, a question she could not really answer because that would reveal that her father, too, had been raping her for years while the rest of the family slept. "Then how do you know that he put in his penis? What color was it? How do you know that was a penis?" (282). The narrator condemns the trauma resulting from the experience of the sexual colonization of her body, bearing witness as she unveils her story and tries to overcome the pain: "As I began therapy and talked about my father and my childhood, it felt like ripping off a huge, thick burn scar that covered my whole chest. Each telling felt like I was ripping the scar an inch at a time, it was so painful" (283). By telling her story, the Latina Anónima starts tearing and healing these wounds, coming to terms with her body and her traumatic experiences—a de/construction of her body and her selves. At the end of the testimonio, the Latina Anónima posits herself as "a survivor, not a victim," realizing that she is not to be blamed for what happened to her and learning to uncover "the shame [she] felt toward [her] body [which] reflected the abuses imposed upon [her]" (283). And

with each telling, the Latina Anónima became able to take "control over the narrative and felt some empowerment by telling them from [her] point of view" (284). In this way, the Latina Anónima calls attention to the healing and de/constructive power of her writing and narrating processes as she participates in the testimonial practices with the other members of TLFG.

This healing de/constructive process can also be seen in the testimonio titled "Biting Through," also from the second section, where the anonymous narrator, who suffers from depression, has a neighbor over to complain about her and other neighbors: "She knows she's talking to an empty body. I have gone away and she doesn't know where to find me. I am above her, sitting on the doorframe, my knees drawn up, my arms around them. I wait for her to leave" (246). The narrator's dissociation from her body is an effort to "not feel the pain" and the depression and passivity she has grown into, reasons unexplained. "But the body pulls me in. […] Every day I split myself in two, spend hours putting myself together again." (246). By rupturing her mind and body, the Latina Anónima moves away from the imperialist and patriarchal forces seeking to regulate Latina bodies, turning this fragmentation into a deconstruction and construction of her mestiza subjectivities—de/construction—as a tactic to overcome the trauma. For the anonymous narrator(s), telling her/their stories of physical and emotional abuse is an empowering act, one that enables them to gain back their control over their bodies—a re-membering of the body as the testimonial act facilitated through TLFG's practice of cultural translation, translenguaje, friendship and comadreo—allows the Latina/s Anónima/s to give new meaning to the traumatic experience.

With these testimonios, the Latina/s Anónima/s begin a process of physical and spiritual reconfiguration whereby the Latina/s Anónima/s fight against the erasure of their bodies and engage in a non-fragmenting de/construction of

Latina bodies and disruptive identity discourses. Furthermore, by splitting the mind and the body, the Latina/s Anónima/s shift away from the individualistic "I" into the collective consciousness characterizing testimonial practices. In doing so, the Latina Anónima moves towards a collective consciousness that Anzaldúa conceptualizes by breaking the Spanish plural feminine nosotras: "we" splits into "nos" (us) and "otras" (others) (2015). Nos/otras engages one's complex subjectivities and the constant negotiations between multiple value systems, thereby embracing the multiple shifting positions shaping one's subjectivities and her "geographies of selves" (69). In other words, nos/otras embraces Latinas' translocality and transnationality and how these complex subjectivities are marked in Latinas' bodies. The collective consciousness embedded in nos/otras does not erase differences between us and others, but rather engages them in a dialogic relationship (Keating 2005). Therefore, embracing the concept of nos/otras requires confronting the tensions that exist between us and others in order to cherish the commonalities and differences enabling the link between nos/otras. In other words, the shaping of a nos/otras consciousness requires the forging of coalitions through the practices of cultural translation and translenguaje in order to truly engage in the negotiation and validation of difference. By performing cultural translation and translenguaje, the Latina/s Anónima/s acts as a bridge who speaks from the interstices marked by the slash separating nos/otras—dividing us from others. Furthermore, as the Latina/s Anónima/s embody TLFG's reconceptualization of Latinidad/es within and beyond national and geographical boundaries, the collective consciousness of nos/otras embodied by the Latina Anónima serves to disrupt the "national boundaries dividing us from 'others' (nos/otras)" (Anzaldúa 2015, 141). Speaking from the cracks, then, the Latina/s Anonima/s' enactment of a collective nos/otras consciousness bolsters their challenge to ethnocentric modes of solidarity through their testimonial and translational practices.

The empowering nature of this process of re/membering and de/constructing is also lived by the Latina Anónima in "La Tra(d)ición," narrated in the second section. In this testimonio, the narrator tells of how, in a visit to the gynecologist—who happens to be her "father's illegitimate brother" (TLGF 2001, 204)—she is sexually abused but forced to silence because "he is a doctor y mi tío. Y a mí no me enseñaron a cuestionar a los médicos, ni a ningún hombre, come to think of it" (205).[7] The title of the testimonio, "La Tra(d)ición" censures male supremacy by explaining that "In Spanish the word 'betrayal' (traición) is embedded in the word for 'tradition' (tradición)" (TLFG 2001, 204). During the pelvic exam, the narrator of "La Tra(d)ición," becomes 'just a body part,' her genitalia silenced because of the enforced "lealtad a la familia y el miedo y la vergüenza" (205).[8] The Latina Anónima concludes by scorning her abuser, becoming an active resisting subject who strongly deviates from the ideal testimonial passive subject as she openly criticizes the patriarchal and colonial forces appropriating her body (Bañales 2014). Her testimonio ends with "the voice [that] screams from the other side of the mirror" (TLFG 2001, 205). In a text that she only offers in Spanish, clearly condemning patriarchy, she states:

> En mí no lograste tu venganza. Parí hijos, disfruté al hacer el amor. Pero yo tampoco gane. Cuando el sexo es arma de violencia, y el poder se usa para el mal, no hay ganadores. Mantuve tu secreto y mi silencio me hizo tu cómplice. […] Pero no soy tu víctima. Contigo aprendí la desconfianza, pero también aprendí a protegerme mejor. Y ya no guardo el silencio ni protejo tu secreto. Y espero estar viva cuando tú mueras (205).[9]

Like the narrator of "Night Terrors," despite the sense of guilt and shame she felt from these abuses, the Latina Anónima does not see herself as a victim anymore, and openly acknowledges the ways in which her perpetrator did

not rob her of her sexuality or her agency; by giving her testimonio she "does not remain silent nor does she protect [his] secret" (translated from page 205). Furthermore, with her anonymity, the Latina Anónima gives voice to the many women who have also suffered from this doctor's abusive power—"¿A cuántas más les has hecho lo mismo? ¿Cuántas más caminan por el mundo sintiéndose sucias porque violaste tu privilegio y poder de médico?" (206)[10]—but also to many other rape victims who are forced to remain silent while their bodies are marked with these abuses.

In "La Princesa," from the third section titled "The Body Re/Members," the Latina Anónima denounces her experiences with domestic violence as she narrates her escape from her abusive partner. It is interesting to note the structure of this testimonio, as the narrator merges the story of two moments. She writes her escape in regular font, while she uses italics to insert the memories of two moments of violence which are particularly important: the first time he hit her, and the time she finally "snapped" (286). She recalls how she went back to her mother's, trying to recover and continuously asking herself how and why she had let herself become victim of this abuse when only years before she "had been special": "My entire history, up until this point, had been laced with validation, awards, and recognition," not only academically but also at home (287). This structure posits an abrupt challenge to traditional forms of the testimonial genre, as the narrator explicitly illustrates her role as ethnographer and testimoniante, and the ways in which the testimonial act voices and theorizes these experiences. Her testimonio enables her to speak from the gaps marked by using different lettering, and her anonymity, built through a process of cultural translation and translenguaje, empowers the Latina Anónima to construct a collective form of subjectivities; her experiences with domestic abuse are, unfortunately, "experiences that can and do happen to any Latina" (14).

Further engaging with her theorizing and translation process and seeking ways to heal, the Latina Anónima in "La Princesa" develops "a theory for princesas of color," based on Lenore Walker's research presented in *The Battered Woman* (1979), where she "developed a typology of characteristics and types of women who tend to become victims of domestic violence" (TLFG 2001, 287). Walker identifies "the princess syndrome," affecting women who have always been protected and validated, as the Latina Anónima explains she was. When the "princess" faces these abuses, she enters into a state of shock; but having never felt invalidated like this, the princess tries to change the abuser's opinion of her, thus going through "all the typical cycles before leaving the batterer," instead of abandoning him right away (287). Seeing herself reflected in these descriptions, the Latina Anónima develops "a theory for princesas of color" (288). By articulating this theory, the Latina Anónima points to the need for the development of intersectional theories that will acknowledge the experiences of Latinas and Latinamericanas—theories for all of the Latinas Anónimas out there who are victims of abuse in one way or another. Ultimately, la princesa anónima pinpoints the ways in which the act of re-membering through testimonio enabled her to heal her "caja de llagas, my box of scars" (288). Speaking from these wounds, la princesa anónima engages in a process of de/construction of her body and the bodies of other princesas of color.

This healing de/constructive process allows the Latina Anónima to also engage in the celebratory practice that concludes *Telling to Live* with the section "Passion, Desires and Celebrations." TLFG presents their section "Passion, Desires, and Celebrations" as the culmination of their testimonial practices; a celebratory affirmation of their Latina identities and the friendships and comadreo they developed through the rhetorical practices performed through their use of testimonio methodology: "A Pan-Latina party for all!" (304). The testimonios in this section are a written record of their noches de tertulia, or their nightly

gatherings, where they spent time sharing their writings, dancing, and laughing with each other to "ease the weariness from our intense work sessions" of the day (15). The transformation of their stories from their tertulias, which they named Café Baca, to the section "Passion, Desires and Celebrations" illustrates how the connections TLFG developed through their testimonial practices extend beyond the traditional testimoniante-ethnographer relationship characterizing hegemonic forms of testimonio. Additionally, the shaping of this section stresses TLFG's focus on creating friendships and comadreo with one another. Thus, these testimonios are seen as "a rich tribute to our different latinidades femeninas y feministas" (303-4); a celebration of how their testimonial and translational practices led them to engage in solidarity and create translocal and transnational friendships and comadreo with one another.

There is only one anonymous testimonio in this section, "Entre Nosotras," a title which reminds us of the ways in which the Latina Anónima embraces a nos/otras collective consciousness. This testimonio narrates an intimate encounter between two women, an encounter that celebrates the Latina feminist coalitions TLFG has created through their testimonial rhetorical practices and the crafting of the Latina Anónima. As the Latina Anónima reflects on this pleasant moment, she turns this testimonio into a source of empowerment, "strength and perseverance, treasures to be taken out only in those more desperate moments when the war outside becomes too overwhelming" (333). With these words, the Latina Anónima calls attention to the ways in which this testimonio had also never been told but differs from the traumatic ones that had shaped the Latina Anónima in the second round of testimonios. "Entre Nosotras" highlights the utility of the Latina Anónima beyond the particular forms of trauma experienced by the collective the Latina/s Anónima/s embody/ies. With "Entre Nosotras," then, the Latina Anónima joins the "toast" to TLFG's amistad y comadreo and the "latinidades femeninas y feministas" they celebrated every night at Café Baca,

and invites others to join the celebration: "We hope the reader might feel inspired to dance with us" (304). This is a wish that nourishes TLFG's call for the forging of transnational, translocal, and glocal forms of solidarities, and which can be achieved through the shaping of an anonymous narrating body like the Latina Anónima. The crafting of the Latina Anónima becomes *the* tactic of resistance and recovery they set out to consider in the shaping of their second round of testimonios collected in the section "Alchemies of Erasure." And, I would dare say, the Latina Anónima becomes a hopeful gesture moving towards the "forging of commonalities" necessary to make the move from nos/otras to nosotras (Keating 2005, 8).[11]

It is important to note that the Latina Anónima only acknowledges her anonymity in one testimonio titled "I Still Don't Know Why," located in the second section, "Alchemies of Erasure." As the narrator of "I Still Don't Know Why" denounces her experiences with sexual harassment while in graduate school, she explains "It's good to talk about this 'dirty secret,' even without names, because I have blamed myself for so long. It has been only by talking to other women that I have realized that I suffered at the hands of someone who abused his power in an academic setting. And I wasn't the only one with this particular man" (TLFG 2001, 225). With these lines, the Latina Anónima acknowledges the ways in which her anonymity has a double function. On the one hand, revealing her identity could affect her position in academia, while on the other, her anonymity emphasizes the ways in which her story could be told by any of the other women who were abused by this or other male professor/s. This testimonio disrupts the sense of vulnerability the Latina Anónima felt at this hegemonic institution through the telling of an experience that not only affects her, the narrator, but also many other Latinas, Latinamericanas, and women of color in academia. What is at stake in the narration of "I Still Don't Know Why" is not the identification of the

perpetrator and victims themselves; instead, by giving voice to this testimonio anonymously, the narrator aims to heal the feelings of vulnerability and guilt affecting the victims, and turns the act of bearing witness into a source of support for herself and for other Latinas and Latinamericanas. The specific identities of the narrator/s are not important, because there are so many Latinas and Latinamericanas who have been victims of these types of abuses.

By performing cultural translation and translenguaje, then, the Latina Anónima becomes a representative of other women victims of these experiences of abuse and marginalization, and does so by emphasizing their coalitional Latinidad/es and the Latina/Latinamericana networks TLFG creates through testimonio. In other words, by creating an anonymous transnational and translocal individual/collective subject, the Latina Anónima un-labels, or avoids the problems that can emerge in the traversing of labels and discourses, and the development of true political solidarities, friendships, and comadreo. This is not only achieved through the anonymity of the narrator, but also because, by performing cultural translation and translenguaje, the Latina Anónima has engaged in a process of negotiating the meanings and contexts of identity labels, their positionalities, their experiences, and the vectors of power shaping their testimonial practices and theorization. By creating the Latina Anónima as a representative of the "experiences that can and do happen to any Latina" (14), TLFG has shown an understanding of how their translocality and transnationality affect their complex subjectivities, and has engaged in a process of translating the self within this translocality.

We should not forget, however, the role that friendship plays in mediating cultural translation and translenguaje, and TLFG's consequential creation of alliances. With these testimonios, the Latina Anónima, and ultimately the eighteen members of TLFG, denounce the silencing of their stories while they engage in solidarity as amigas, as friends, and as comadres, turning

their experiences of erasure into a source of empowerment. It should be noted that the development of friendships and comadreo does not negate the value and strengthening power of expressing anger in the shaping of feminist coalitions and theories (Lorde 1984). Instead, TLFG stresses that feelings of anger, difference, disagreements, and tension should always be addressed, transforming them into actions and a strengthening force that would enable the development of real solidarities, or friendships (2001). Thus, we must not seek to replace sisterhoods with friendships or comadreo. A politics of solidarity, on the basis of sisterhoods does not equal friendship, and friendship does not equal comadreo. This is proven by TLFG, who realized early on in their meetings that, given their differing identities, they first needed to agree on a political and coalitional definition of Latinidad/es that would permit their collective theorization process through testimonio and their shaping of the Latina Anónima. These negotiations encouraged the members of TLFG to transform their sisterhoods into friendships, and eventually comadreo, creating a translocal and transnational Latina feminist space. Thus, I believe that by engaging in cultural translation, translenguaje, and reconceptualizing sisterhoods through testimonio, TLFG's creation of the Latina Anónima further develops the ways in which Latina feminists can shape a transnational and translocal communal speech and political subjectivities; a space for a politics of friendships and/or comadreo between and among Latinas, Latinamericanas, and other Latinas Anónimas across the world.

Importantly, TLFG's reconceptualization of testimonio and their move towards nos/otras with the Latina Anónima shows the need to theorize testimonio outside of the Western paradigm in order to understand its rhetorical, literary, cultural, and political functions and its role in the development of transborder solidarities. For example, as TLFG discusses their efforts to loosen the nodes of power interfering with their testimonial practices,

they call attention to the scholarly need to approach testimonio as a rhetorical space where power is constantly exchanged and to consider the vectors of power embedded in testimonio from a transnational and translocal framework. Furthermore, as translocal and transnational subjects, the subjectivities of TLFG's testimonial "I"(s) in the Latina Anónima are continuously shifting, and so, I believe that there are various individuals and various collectives embedded in this narrating subject. As these subject positions shift, the constructed subjectivity does too—an absolute challenge to canonical understandings of testimonio and the individual-collective relationships. It is thus necessary to pay attention to the socio-geo-political and historical factors shaping the narrating and narrated subjectivities and their politics of location, and to apply concepts such as the translocal, glocal, or comadreo to the study of Latina feminists' testimonio, and also for the study of the genre of testimonio overall.

Ultimately, TLFG's construction of the Latina Anónima illustrates that there is a crucial urgency to examine the ways in which testimonial practices circulate across borders in order to highlight the problems that can emerge when a testimonio travels from one context to another, because we must not only transfer and translate the content of the text, but also its cultural and political goals. The practices of cultural translation and translenguaje allow us to acknowledge the import of the narrator(s)' histories and subjectivities to fully acknowledge the ways in which rhetorical practices can circulate across borders. In turn, engaging in these practices can help life writing scholars, transnational feminist scholars, and transnational Latina and Latinamericana feminists to articulate new and revised rhetorical methods for the articulation of Latina and Latinamericana feminist epistemologies and the development of new forms of solidarities, friendships, and comadreo.

Notes

[1] Indeed, in the introduction to *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation*, edited by Sonia E. Alvarez (2014) draws on her personal experience to highlight the impact of location and historical racial formation on hegemonic conceptualizations of race and color. As she puts it, whereas she is "an ethnicized Cuban American in south Florida and a racialized Latina in New England, for instance whenever [she] deplane[s] in Sao Paulo [she] instantly 'become[s] white'" (3). Reighan Gillam (2016) also reflects on her own personal experiences and (miss) readings of her body while in Brazil due to her lighter skin and Afro-Brazilians' popular belief that African-Americans are "racially singular" compared to Brazilians' "mixed race" (99). Furthermore, she coins the phrase "African diaspora looking relations" (100) to highlight the transnational flows in constructions of the nation and racial ideologies among African-Americans and Afro-Brazilians. Luz del Alba Acevedo (2001) also contemplates her personal navigation of racial ideologies in her testimonio "Daughter of Bootstrap" in *Telling to Live*. Although an international student in England, her "Eastern appearance" also led her to become "part of the colonial 'other' for the British" (145). Acevedo's confrontation with racializing discourses continued when she migrated to the United States "and traded labels;" she "was no longer an international student but a Black Puerto Rican woman. This was the label given by a Polish man working as a building superintendent in Chicago" (145). Discussing her identity with her thesis advisor, she defined herself as a Black woman, but her advisor responded "No you are not! You are a Puerto Rican!" (145). These experiences demonstrate the need to discuss the ways in which racial categories are hegemonically constructed and how they travel across different locations.

[2] For more examples of the ways in which certain categories do not properly translate across borders see Pascha Bueno-Hansen's (2014) discussion of the depoliticization of the term "queer" in Peru; Ana Rebeca Prada's efforts to translate Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza* for her students in Bolivia (found in Alvarez et al. 2014); Victoria M. Bañales critique of traditional readings of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, where her gendered ethnic identity is usually ignored because of the focus on the community (2014); or Gudrun-Alexi Knapp (2005), who studies the challenges of the transatlantic travel of the categories of race, class, and gender from the U.S. to Germany within the context of feminism.

[3] Indeed, terms such as "women of color" or "third world women" have been problematized by activists and scholars of color and emphasize the import of the socio-and geopolitical factors on the construction of labels and identity markers. Studying the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) and its impact in the coalitions leading to the articulation of the political subjectivity of women of color, Maylei Blackwell asserts that "transnational political processes have fundamentally shaped feminist identities and politics *within* the United States" (2014, 301), which is precisely where academic conversations about the transnational have emerged (Nagar and Lock Swarr 2010, 3). Thus, as Sandra Stanley (1998) states, "the very term 'women of color' resists definition" (3). For scholars like bell hooks, the term "women of color" "may posit an illusory homogeneous subject, working to 'erase class and other differences,' while scholars like Gayatri Spivak critique the term's disregard for "shifting significations of 'color' in different societal contexts" (qtd. in Stanley 1998, 3). Drawing on feminist scholarship, Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (2002,

71-72) also critique the homogenization enacted by the political women of color feminisms project whereby women's bodies become "transhistorical and cross-cultural," only defined as *women*. To this, however, Latinas such as Chela Sandoval (2000, 15) respond that the collectives formed by women of color—mainly named U.S. third world feminists in her writings—are not a monolithic subject, but rather a tactical position. Likewise, Chandra Mohanty (qtd. in Stanley 1998, 7) claims that the term women of color or third world women "designates political constituency, not a biological or even sociological one." This can be seen in how the label women of color refers to people of "African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the U.S.," but also "new immigrants to the U.S." (7). Thus, Mohanty adds, "[W]hat seems to constitute 'women of color' or 'third world women' as a viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications" (7).The understanding of the term "women of color" as a tactical position of resistance highlights the need to engage in transnational dialogue to understand who, and how, women shape a women of color political subjectivity/ies—their historical and geopolitical locations—and the barriers they may encounter across borders.

[4] The Latina Feminist Group is formed by Luz del Alba Acevedo, Norma Alarcón, Celia Alvarez, Ruth Behar, Rina Benmayor, Norma E. Cantú, Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Gloria Holguín Cuádraz, Liza Fiol-Matta, Yvette Flores-Ortiz, Inés Hernández-Ávila, Aurora Levins Morales, Clara Lomas, Iris Ofelia López, Mirtha N. Quintanales, Eliana Rivero, Caridad Souza, and Patricia Zavella.

[5] It is important to note that TLFG acknowledges the seeming fragility of the "pan-Latino/a solidarity" they have built by embracing the Latina label to represent their collective (5), but emphasizes (in their introduction, and with their testimonios) that the collaborations leading to this coalitional use accounts for AfroLatinas, Indigenous Latinas, Jewish Latinas, and other forms of Latinidad/es rather than assuming "a common Latina experience" (4). Created through TLFG's testimonial practices and, I argue, their translational political practices, the Latina Anónima represents different forms of Latinidad/es by embracing a collective and a network of Latinas and Latinamericanas.

[6] Notably, there is no exact translation for the cultural practice of comadreo to the English language. This untranslatability highlights the rhetorical exigence to engage in translational feminist political practices across sociocultural, geopolitical, and theoretical borders.

[7] Translation: He is a doctor and my uncle. And I was not taught to question doctors, or any men, come to think of it.

[8] Translation: loyalty to the family and the fear and the shame

[9] Translation: You did not get your revenge with me. I gave birth, I enjoyed making love. But I didn't win either. When sex is used as a violent weapon, and power is used to inflict pain there are no winners. I kept your secret and my silence made me your accomplice. […] But I am not your victim. With you I learned to mistrust, but I also learned to protect myself better. And I don't remain silent or keep your secret anymore. And I hope to be alive the day you die.

[10] Translation: To how many more women did you do this? How many more women walk around the world feeling dirty because you violated their privilege and your medical power?

[11] Anzaldúa hoped that "sometime in the future we may become nosotras without the slash," because it holds the promise of a negotiation, of coming to terms; by removing the slash, the term nosotras bridges the differences that exist, "dialogically," between us/them, but does so, precisely, by removing the slash that acts as a bridge between these differences (Keating 2005, 7-8).

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