

FEMINISM IN TRANSLATION

The Epistemology of the South, Coloniality of Gender, and Latin American Feminism¹

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Abstract

This article provides a Latin American feminist critique of early decolonial theories focusing on the work of Anibal Quijano and Enrique Dussel. Although decolonial theorists refer to Chicana feminist scholarship in their work, the work of Latin American feminists is ignored. However, the author argues that Chicana feminist theory cannot stand in for Latin American feminist theory because “*lo latinoamericano*” gets lost in translation. Latin American feminists must do their own theoretical work. Central to the critique of the use of gender in decolonial theory is an analysis of the social pacts among white capitalists and white working-class men that not only exclude white women but make citizenship and democracy impossible for men and women of color in the metropolis as well as in the colony. By revealing the nexus between gender, race, and democracy, not only is the coloniality of gender apparent, but also the coloniality of democracy.

We are currently witnessing a unique political and epistemological moment in Latin America. After more than two decades of neoliberal democracy, we are experiencing a shift toward a left that sees itself rooted in new social movements of the sectors most excluded by the democracy of neoliberal capitalism, which are neither the industrial workers of the cities nor the smallholder or wage-earning peasants of the past. Within the current Latin American context, Indigenous movements stand as the “vanguard” of the new “movementist” boom, although not in the Marxist-Leninist sense, but rather as actors who have the privilege of operating with a new political rationality based on their Otherness and their uprising against the coloniality of power that has ruled our societies since their subjugation to the imperial power of the West in 1492. The World Social Forum appears, in this sense, as the space where the different social movements from the depths of Latin American societies and the world converge to create, in the

words of Arturo Escobar, “an other paradigm” (*un paradigma otro*) or knowledge otherwise (*conocimiento de otro modo*) (Escobar 2003).²

At the same time as the World Social Forum is described as a new social and political phenomenon that champions diversity and the ontological breakthrough of subjects previously made invisible and violated by modernity, capitalism, and Eurocentered knowledge, within Latin American and US academia innovative knowledges are being built that seek to draw on this Latin American momentum of social movements and the spirit of the World Social Forum. It is worth noting here that although the World Social Forum is a transnational movement that seeks intercultural dialogue, the Latin American component within it is strong and defines to a large extent the content of the new knowledges that are woven from the subcontinent and from academics of the Latin American diaspora in the United States.

What follows is a reflection on these new Latin American knowledges that claim to be the alternative response, five centuries overdue, to Eurocentered and even masculinist knowledge. These knowledges define themselves as transmodern, transcapiatalist, transoccidental, transpostcolonial, and occasionally as feminist. As such they promise not only a new political practice that redefines Western liberal democracy as it actually exists, and an epistemological rupture that opens up spaces to knowledges rendered subaltern by Eurocentrism that goes beyond even the postcolonialism of South Asians and Arabs and might seem at times to include some feminist elements, but also make possible the construction of new subjectivities that speak from the “colonial wound” and promise not only the longed-for liberation from the trauma of conquest but also the end of the teleology of Eurocentrism and the egology of the West and the beginning of decoloniality.³

My reflection on these new knowledges, geopolitically inspired in Latin America, is guided by three questions: How far does the new Latin American “other knowledge” (*conocimiento otro*) go in its inclusion of feminist thought and the question of gender? How can feminism and gender be articulated in this new epistemology of the South (as Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls the new theories [de Sousa Santos 2008]) so that women’s suffering and dreams are considered and their knowledges are not effaced as usual? What is the role of Latin American feminists in the emergence and constitution of the epistemology of the South and what can their contribution be?

The New Masculine Ethos in the Epistemology of the South

Reviews of Latin American decoloniality in both Spanish and English are beginning to proliferate. The Latin American critique of modernity and coloniality, which until just recently was relegated to the margins of the great debates on postmodernism and South Asian postcolonialism of South Asians within the North American academy, is beginning to take center stage. Its approach is not only radical but original and represents the opening of what could be called the Latin American archive within the debates on modernity and coloniality. Nevertheless, after careful feminist scrutiny, this new current of Latin American thought still reveals major limitations in its understanding of the place of gender in its object of research. References to feminist writings from Latin America are also notably absent. This fact should not surprise us given that the great majority of the authors of this new current are Latin American men, white as well as mestizo, heterosexual and middle-class. It is striking, however, that when a gesture is made toward feminism, it is made thinking exclusively of Chicana feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa or Chela Sandoval and not of Latin American feminism. This omission deserves our attention and reflection.

To understand the way in which this new Latin American perspective glosses over the struggles of women in the region requires a careful analysis of its conceptual apparatus and terminology. I will discuss just two of its major exponents, placing greater emphasis on the work of the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, and make some preliminary observations on one of the more recent works of the Argentine liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel. Both authors have attempted to include gender within their conceptual apparatuses and have received some attention from certain feminist theorists. María Lugones, from Argentina, has produced an important critique of Quijano's work (Lugones 2007). And I have done my part in my work on the coloniality of democracy (Mendoza 2014). I developed my critical reading of Quijano before I became acquainted with Lugones's text, but it seems possible to weave the two critiques together to unveil some of the problems of how Quijano deals with gender in his work. I attempt to do this in what follows.

Gender in Aníbal Quijano's Theory

Quijano coined the term *coloniality of power* to describe the pattern of power established by the Spanish crown in the sixteenth century throughout the Americas and that later spread over the entire planet, as the imperial powers of the West took turns subjugating what we know today as the peoples of the Third World: Amerindians; Africans of Africa, the Caribbean, South, Central, and North America; Asians; Arabs; and mestizos (Quijano 2008). (The Aborigines of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand should be added to this list.) Along with his concept of the coloniality of power, Quijano introduces "the idea of race," which arises with the idea of "discovery" and which serves to socially reclassify people in the colonies in a stratified manner according to their relationship with Christianity, "purity of blood," and European languages.

The idea of race, according to Quijano, rearranges all the basic areas of human existence that are present in all power struggles for the control of resources and the products derived from them: sex, labor, collective authority, and subjectivity/intersubjectivity. From this perspective, the idea of race reorders the preexisting gender regimes in colonized societies prior to their colonization. Gender is thus subordinated to the logic of race—perhaps as Marxists previously subordinated gender to the category of class.

Finally, Quijano defines Eurocentrism as the construction of knowledge of the world based on the invention of Europe and Europeans as the most complete version of human evolution in the history of the planet. Eurocentrism's correlative would be understanding the peoples of the colonies as peoples without history and denying their epistemologies—even their status as human beings. With this reasoning, Eurocentrism not only leads to the construction of subjectivities and intersubjectivities between Europeans and non-Europeans based on binary oppositions such as civilization and barbarism, slaves and wage-earners, premodern and modern, developed and underdeveloped, and so on, but also takes for granted the universalization of the epistemic position of Europeans.

Lugones recognizes the explanatory power of Quijano's term *coloniality of power* and develops her concept of *coloniality of gender* from it. She does so, however, based on a constructive critique of the gender preconceptions she finds implicit in Quijano's definition of the coloniality of power. According to Lugones, in the logical narrative of the concept of the coloniality of power, Quijano makes a mistake: assuming that gender and

even sexuality are necessarily structuring elements of all human societies. By assuming that this is so aprioristically, Quijano, without realizing it, accepts the patriarchal, heterosexist, and Eurocentric assumptions that exist about gender. Lugones draws on the work of Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, a Nigerian feminist, and Paula Gunn Allen, an Indigenous feminist from the United States, to show us how gender and the idea of race were at the same time colonial constructs to racialize and gender (*racializar y generizar*) the societies they subjugated (Allen 1986; Oyèwùmí 1997). According to these African and Indigenous feminists, an organizing principle similar to the West's gender categories did not exist in Yoruba societies, nor for the Indigenous peoples of North America, before "contact" and colonization. These societies did not divide or hierarchize their societies on the basis of gender, and women had equal access to public and symbolic power. Their languages and kinship systems did not contain a structure that pointed to the subordination of women to men. There was no gendered division of labor, and their economic relations were based on principles of reciprocity and complementarity. Instead, the most important organizing principle was experience based on chronological age. In short, biological-anatomical sex had little to do with social organization. It was the social that organized the social.

These societies, these anticolonial feminists tell us, valued homosexuality highly and recognized more than two "genders," countering the conventional sexual dimorphism of the West. Considering gender as a concept prior to society and history, as Quijano does, has the effect of naturalizing gender relations and heterosexuality, and even worse, Lugones tells us, it serves to conceal the way in which Third World women experienced colonization and continue to suffer its effects in postcoloniality. This would mean that throughout the processes of colonization, women in these parts of the colonized world were not only racialized but simultaneously reinvented as "women" according to Western discriminatory codes and principles of gender. Colonization created the historical circumstances for African and Indigenous women in North America to lose the relatively egalitarian relations they had with men in their societies and fall not only under the domination of the colonizing men, but also under that of the colonized men. Gender subordination was the price that colonized men brokered in order to retain some control over their societies. This transaction of colonized men with colonizing men explains, according to Lugones, the indifference to the suffering of Third World women that men, even leftist Third World men, manifest by their silence around violence against women today.

This collusion of colonized men with their colonizers prevents the building of strong bonds of solidarity between women and men of the Third World in processes of liberation. But ignoring the historicity and coloniality of gender also blinds white women in the West, who have found it equally difficult to recognize the intersectionality of race and gender and their own complicity in the processes of colonization and capitalist domination. This is why today it is still difficult for feminists of the West to build strong alliances with nonwhite women in their own countries and in the Third World. It is precisely upon reflecting on the difficult alliances of transnational feminism that my critique of Quijano connects with that of Lugones, although I draw more attention to the intersection of gender, race, and class and the consequences this has for the actual exercise of citizenship.

Like Lugones, I am uncomfortable with Quijano's understanding of gender. His idea of race becomes a totalizing concept that not only conceals gender as a historical category and as an instrument of the coloniality of power, but also obstructs an intersectional analysis of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Suppose for a moment that Quijano

and other decolonial theorists were to associate the idea of race that emerges during the Christian conquest of the Americas with the witch hunts and the Holy Inquisition in Europe. Perhaps then it would be easier for them to grant gender its proper historical content and establish the relationship between the genocide of women and the expansion of Christianity and genocide in the Americas. However, like most decolonial theorists, Quijano fails to see the genocide against women or the femicide in Europe that occurred at the same time as the expulsion of the Jews and Moors and the colonization of America as a precursor of the idea of race. Perhaps this is what African and Indigenous feminists intuit when they suggest that the concept of gender imposed in the colony did not exist as such in their societies. The historical forerunner of the genocide of women or femicide, namely the witch hunts throughout several centuries in Europe, had not yet occurred in their territories. This would come later as an effect of colonization and the coloniality of gender that is part and parcel of colonial structure.

Nonetheless, Quijano does a splendid job at showing how the idea of race served to codify the division of labor between slavery and wage labor within the modern colonial capitalist system. That is, he acknowledges the intersection of race and class, but completely ignores “the idea of gender” that occurs concomitantly with the idea of race. For Quijano, the colonial caste system served not only to racially classify colonized subjects but also to designate the types of work to which people had access. The social relations of capital and labor that were engendered by the colonial experience with Spain and later with England and the United States were from their very beginnings subject to a racial division of labor in which unfree, unpaid work (slavery and servitude) was reserved for non-Europeans, and free wage labor for Europeans. Hence, says Quijano, the generalization of wage labor arose where there are white majorities and the coexistence of salaried and nonsalaried work in countries with significant Indigenous presence. Quijano readily draws on the vast historical record throughout North and South America to prove that an ideology of white supremacy was crucial in distinguishing slave labor from wage labor. North American historian David Roediger illustrates the same point with the example of the United States and the way in which slavery in the South increased as wage labor became more common among white men (Roediger 1991). What is interesting is that Quijano is aware that wage labor was reserved only for white men, but he does not elaborate on this fact. If he had, he would have been forced to recognize that within the definition of wage labor is also a gender connotation, not just a racial one. Two things can be deduced from this fact. One, which Quijano and the decolonial theorists acknowledge, is that free wage labor as the main type of capitalism could not have developed and been sustained in the long run without the colonies. Without the enslavement of Africans and Indigenous forced labor, there would be no capitalism. On the other hand, it should be considered that in order to generalize “free” wage labor, it was first necessary to domesticate women in the metropolis and then subject women in the colonies to a gender regime. We saw how this was done systematically by means of witch hunts in Europe from the fifteenth century onwards, both by Protestants and by the Catholic Holy Inquisition.⁴ Later we find it in what Marx called the process of primitive accumulation that dispossessed the peasant masses and largely removed women from the productive sphere, at the same time turning them into overexploited housewives or workers. In the colonies, we saw this with the mass rape of Indigenous women as an instrument of war of conquest and colonial settlement, the loss of their social and political status, enslavement, reduction to servitude, and the deadly intensity of labor, among other things. We can see this “domestication” continuing today with femicides,

trafficking of poor women, sex tourism, the *maquila*, and the feminization of industry and poverty under neoliberal capitalism.

And yet, like Lugones, I sense that the imposition of the categories of race and gender generated deep cracks in the possible solidarities between women in the metropolis and the periphery, and between men and women in the periphery. But we should not exclude the divisions that also exist among women in the periphery, in particular, in Latin America, which is characterized by internal colonization after its colonial emancipation from Spain.

The racialized definition of wage labor created the basis for a social pact between capitalists and the male working class of European origin (whites) to the detriment of nonwhite non-wage laborers. It implied a social pact among men, based on gender, similar to the sexual contract described by Carole Pateman, who in her first works ignored the dimension of race and the coloniality of power (Pateman 1988). The social pact based on gender therefore had political implications in the shaping of citizenship, not only economic ones in the construction of class.

As a matter of fact, the definition of wage labor as a privilege of white European men prevented the majority of poor white men from falling into slavery, and at the same time, freed them from domestic labor. Hence, although male wage labor was subject to capitalist exploitation, the pact served to lay the foundations for the figure of the male citizen: a free individual who has control over his body and who has the right and the time for political participation—legal, civil, individual, and political rights that exclude women and slaves. In other words, without the background of slavery in the colonies, there would be no such white male citizen and male head of household in the West. In a nutshell, the fusion of the ideas of race and gender is key to configuring the free citizenship that the West knew when capitalism and liberal democracy were being shaped. We could conclude then that the real liberal democracy existing in the West was possible only because of this fusion of race and gender. That is why it is necessary to speak not only of the coloniality of gender but also of the coloniality of liberal democracy. Or to put it another way, the establishment of nation-states in the West or racist patriarchal capitalisms could not have been possible without colonization. It is by understanding this process that we come to see the convergence of the heterosexual system, what Lugones calls the modern colonial gender system, with capitalism and liberal democracy.

It is important to stress that the social pact of gender among white men generated a series of interests that excluded white women. The latter did not gain equal access to either citizenship or wage labor. White women lost control over their bodies with the witch hunts and did not benefit from the coloniality of power in the same way as white men. To this day, they have had to fight for access to wage labor under the same conditions as men and for citizenship. This tells us that the gender pact among white men actually rests on a precarious foundation. On the one hand, it depends on exploitative capitalist relations among men, and on the other hand, it requires the subordination of women. The pact can easily be broken by the radicalization of male workers, by the rapacity of capitalists, at any time when the colonized revolt, or when white women demand entrance into the white male social pact, among other things. Without setting barriers to wage labor or keeping wages below survival level, and without subjecting nonwhites and non-Europeans—women and men—on the periphery to incomplete citizenship, the status of white men would be seriously threatened. But white women's access to wage labor and full citizenship is just as destabilizing. This creates a tension between white men and white women that is beneficial to capital

because it undermines solidarity across genders in the labor market and in the political sphere. Maintaining super-exploitative labor relations in the periphery is necessary to contain pressures from different sides and to prevent at all costs the establishment of democracies in the periphery.

Western democracy cannot coexist with democracy in Third World countries, but neither can it be fully carried out in its own geographies. However, the internal contradictions of capitalist democracies have ended up benefiting the white women of the metropolis, who have gradually been able to seize an economic and political share from the social pact of white men—provided, of course, that they accept the racist terms of the pact, something they have so far bartered with white men, particularly through the heterosexual privilege that comes through marriage and the benefits extracted from the civil rights gains of Afro-American people. The advancement of their civil rights can be said to have depended on the super-exploitation of Black, Latina, and Indigenous women within their countries, and of women in the periphery, exploitation that today extends to migrant women in the context of the global economy. It is important to note that currently, this collateral pact between men and white women of the metropolis manifests itself in a perverse way in the war against terrorism and the institutionalization of torture, as was exposed in the Abu Ghraib case in the United States.

In the war on terror, the ploy of the coloniality of gender was unmasked in the justification of the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in the name of liberating oppressed women in the Middle East. The US government resorted to the old mechanism of colonial power (to which the British and French have also resorted in the Middle East) of using, for its own purposes of recolonization, the pretext of liberating the women of the colonies from the patriarchal barbarism to which they are subjected. What is interesting in this case is that a sector of feminism and the North American female population not only gave their blessing to the invasion but demanded to be part of the military operation. In the West, new generations of women (white and nonwhite) interpret the right to participate in their government's wars of aggression on equal terms with men as part of feminist struggles. The new rights that some feminists in the global North are demanding include participation as combat troops and in intelligence services that use torture as a legitimate means for national security objectives. In this sense, the torture that occurred at Abu Ghraib with its pornographic connotations constitute a new version of the coloniality of gender and sexuality. The peculiarity of Abu Ghraib lies in the fact that perhaps for the first time in the history of the West, white women were heading the chain of command and directly used torture and sexual humiliation against men of the colony.

In the past, white women had often been bystanders and silent accomplices to the necropolitics that characterize the coloniality of power, such as colonial wars, or as motives for crime and as joyful spectators of the lynchings of Black men in the United States at the height of US apartheid, rather than intellectual or direct perpetrators of colonial oppression. The war on terror redefined the coloniality of gender and took it to another level.

For this reason, it is difficult to expect a serious attack on the modern colonial capitalist gender system from white women in the metropolis in the near future. Transnational solidarity between women of the metropolis and the periphery in these circumstances remains a great challenge, one to be reconsidered and yet resolved. The irony is that the racist complicity of white women in the new colonial adventures incorporates nonwhite working-class women in the name of feminism. But perhaps

even more tragic is the fact that the very incorporation of women (white and nonwhite) into the ploy of the coloniality of gender reinforces the gender pact among white men and their own oppression as women. The scandalous sexual abuse of women enlisted in the US military and, in general, the hypersexualization and hypermasculinization of US militarism are proof of this.

The coloniality of power and the coloniality of gender operate internally in Latin America as well. As decolonial theorists tell us, independence did not translate into decolonization of our societies. The same dilemmas of the metropolises are found within our societies. After all, an alliance between colonized men and colonizers oppresses women in the colonies, as Lugones and many Latin American feminists have pointed out. In addition to the pact between white men and the collateral pact between white Western men and women, another pact at the heart of Latin America must be analyzed in depth by us Latin American feminists. How do Latin American men imagine the dissolution of this secret pact among the men of the colony?

Gender in the *Twenty Theses on Politics* by Enrique Dussel

Enrique Dussel has put forward a new theory and a political proposal based on twenty theses that help us answer our question (Dussel 2008). The theses detail a program that, in his words, lays the foundations for a transmodern, transc capitalist civilization, beyond liberalism and socialism. According to his own statements, the political model he proposes is as close to perfect as we can get in this historical moment in which those excluded from the modern colonial capitalist neoliberal system are breaking into history in spaces such as the World Social Forum, the Zapatista movement, or the new constituent assemblies. In this conglomerate of movements taking the political stage for the first time, feminists are taken into account for their particular demand for respect of women's rights. The incorporation of feminist demands would reflect the Zapatista slogan that Dussel takes up in his political plan, which calls for a world where many worlds fit—the least-excluding world possible.

Dussel interprets this Zapatista statement as a political foundation that would help us create a unifying category for all movements, classes, races, feminisms, and so on. Diversity and particular demands are to be negotiated around a hegemonic bloc. That hegemonic bloc is what he calls *pueblo* (the people), the community, or the “we” of Latin America's Indigenous traditions, which contrasts with the Western totalizing sense of community in which differences are eliminated—what Evo Morales calls “the social bloc of the oppressed.”

Now, the concept of the *pueblo* is not new in the tradition of the Latin American left and has been repeatedly criticized from both the left and the right for its vague and often demagogic or populist pretensions. The concept of *pueblo* is often seen as a unitary category. Feminists in the region and the United States have had extensive experience of what it means to operate with unitary categories that claim to represent difference and oppression. We know very well that the unitary category of gender excluded poor, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and lesbian women, among others. On the other hand, we have already seen that gender, when merged with race, served as an instrument of domination in the processes of colonization and capitalism. Lesbians have said something similar in relation to sexuality by revealing gender as a category that depends on a heterosexual matrix and the abjection of lesbianism.

In some instances, feminists have pointed out to Dussel that the concept of the poor used within liberation theology, which is closely related to the concept of the *pueblo*

now in use, operates as an undifferentiated hegemonic concept that does not include the sufferings of women. For example, Elina Vuola has identified the lack of a sexual ethic in liberation theology (Vuola 2003). According to Vuola, violence against women, rape and sexual harassment, deaths from illegal abortions, maternal and infant mortality, and femicides all fall outside of liberation theology. Liberation theologians, though rightly acknowledging the suffering on the basis of class, blindly accept the Vatican's doctrine when it comes to women's reproductive rights. It appears that Dussel has not taken note of this feminist critique, and his attempt to be more inclusive with the term *pueblo* still fails to shake off its masculinist bias.

To start with, it is striking that his political treatise of the twenty theses retains the public/private division. Dussel begins by affirming that the private is the intersubjective space that protects subjects from being observed and attacked by other members of other intersubjective systems, and the public is the intersubjective space where subjects perform based on roles and are exposed to the gaze of other actors of other intersubjective systems. He claims that the public is political by definition and that the public political is the only space where civilizational change is possible.

From a feminist perspective, preserving this division means a step backward in political thought. Let us recall the old slogan that the personal is political, which is the very foundation of feminism. It would be problematic for women to depoliticize the private sphere and define it as devoid of power conflicts or as a "prepolitical" sphere because, as we well know, women are not protected from being observed and attacked by other members of other intersubjective systems in private spheres. The private is not unidimensional; intersubjective systems that operate at both the public and private levels are transferred within it. For feminists, assuming the separation of the private and the public would preserve not only the coloniality of gender but also the very Eurocentered liberal conception of politics that Dussel claims to want to overcome. By deeming the public sphere the only space where the exclusion of women and feminist demands can be resolved, Dussel leaves the conflicts of everyday life and the micro-physics of power in the public sphere largely untheorized. The ground where most of the violations of women's rights take place is depicted as part of the prepolitical. But even worse, the transfer of micro-powers from the private to the public sphere—as in the sexual tortures of the Abu Ghraib case, or the rape of women, or the murder of transgender people in political crises like the coup in Honduras—would be unintelligible in Dussel's schema if we see the private and the public as separate spheres. His definition of politics, for our feminist perspective, remains excessively masculinist.

What is interesting, however, is how the ethical principles that Dussel chooses to redefine the "new" politics are drawn from Western as well as Eastern and Amerindian feminist imaginaries, and that some feminists in the global North have used in their own formulations of the political. Let us take his idea that the new politics aims at the perpetuation of life. This new politics privileges the desire to stay alive over the desire to kill. The new political paradigm would reject the necropolitics of Western genocidal reason that justifies the death of more than two-thirds of humanity and the plunder of its resources and would instead promote the continued existence and coexistence with others: the excluded. This is tantamount to surviving by thriving alongside the other: the excluded, the poor, the *pueblo*. It is a politics, as Dussel calls it, of alterity. The ethos of the politics of alterity, in his words, is life itself. The concrete life of each single person is the end-in-itself. Political concerns should be aimed at meeting the vital needs of the *pueblo* where power resides. The function of political institutions is to fulfill this mandate of the people. Informed by Zapatista thought again, the political practice is

based on commanding by obeying, listening to those who precede me—and not in a renunciation and alienation of power from its source, the people. The starting point of the politics of alterity cannot be the isolated individual, like Robinson Crusoe. In a moment of illumination, Dussel exclaims that Robinson Crusoe could not have even been born without the community. But not without a woman either, we feminists would add, revealing once again how the unitary concepts of community and *pueblo* serve to cloud gender relations.

Paradoxically, Dussel fails to recognize the feminine and feminist principle present in his discourse. The new political paradigm he proposes is quite similar to the maternal thinking of Sarah Ruddick and the construction of a politics of peace and nonviolence (Ruddick 1989). Maternal work in this sense, just like the politics of alterity, holds the preservation of life as its fundamental principle; it is also about the creation of a life in which human beings grow and prosper free of violence and develop an intersubjectivity in both the private and public spheres based on reciprocity and nonviolence. The political model of maternal thinking promotes an economy of care and the preservation of life on the planet, in the same way that Dussel imagines a political and economic system that aims to preserve life eternally—as if the earth would never become extinct. The new feminist movements against nonviolence of the fourth wave, such as Code Pink, that emerged in the wake of the war on terrorism, are based on premises reminiscent of Ruddick's maternal thinking. We could say that this feminist thought goes even further than Dussel, since it is profoundly antimilitarist and does not justify violence under any circumstances. Dussel in turn, surprisingly reserves the right to use violence in cases of community self-defense, although he does not tell us precisely at what point violence would be justified.

We can admit, however, that Dussel's politics of alterity, insofar as it holds life as its maximum principle and end, denotes an advance in the masculinist thinking of leftist politics in the region, which in the past has been militaristic, even in its parliamentary phase. It incorporates important premises of feminist thought, although they appear disconnected from the thinking of the Indigenous movements he prefers and are not explicitly acknowledged in his discourse. But it preserves masculinist elements that must be called out and subjected to greater scrutiny than I have been able to do here. If decolonial thought is to take seriously the inclusion of women's voices, it also needs to establish a dialogue with Latin American feminists. It is evident in the writings of Dussel and other exponents that this dialogue has not yet begun. Latin American feminists, for their part, must in turn elaborate a decolonial way of thinking that articulates and reveals how the coloniality of gender, race, class, and sexuality continues to determine our societies and our thinking, including feminist thinking.

Latin American Feminism and Epistemology of the South

At the beginning of this article, I asked what the role of Latin American feminists has been in the construction of an epistemology of the South, and what their contributions could be. We know that Latin American feminists have made great contributions in the debates of the World Social Forum and in the political processes of the region. However, within the theories that are woven from the Forum, the absence of references to Latin American feminist authors is notable.

Elsewhere, I have referred to the absence of a Latin American feminist theory that articulates, as Nelly Richard would say, “*lo latinoamericano*”⁵ as a difference that differentiates” (Richard 2004). Perhaps this lack of articulation of a Latin American feminist

theory on its own is responsible for the silence surrounding feminist ideas from the region. For example, the postcolonial critique of South Asia has a clear feminist strand with the presence of great figures such as Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty. Indigenous women in North America and African theorists such as Oyèwùmí have not only succeeded in constructing a gender theory based on their particular colonial experience, but have also changed the way we think about gender. Chicana and African American women in the United States have revolutionized feminist theory with concepts such as the intersectionality of gender, race, class, and sexuality, *mestiza* consciousness and the border thinking to which decolonial theorists refer so much. But I am unaware of a feminist theory of the region that delves into its own colonial and postcolonial experience. Chicanas cannot take the place of Latin American feminist theory. Even Lugones herself, who wielded the idea of coloniality of gender from Quijano, did not base her reflection on Latin America, but on the theoretical advances of Indigenous North American and African feminists.

Although it is true that the works of Chicana authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Norma Alarcón, Emma Pérez, Chela Sandoval, and others have shown the epistemic potential of “*lo latinoamericano*,” they deliver a dubbed and subtitled image of Latin America. Written in English with bits and pieces of Spanish and even Nahuatl, this theory weaves the Indigenous, the peasant, the migrant, and “*lo latinoamericano*” into the fabric of the new Anglo experience, an experience already colored by the Indigenous, peasant, and “*lo latinoamericano*” of an earlier phase in the history of the territory that is now the United States. The region in which “*lo chicano latinoamericano*” is being written is in fact a crossing of borders where the coloniality of Anglo and Spanish power come together to transform the meaning of “*lo latinoamericano*.” But the writing of “*lo latinoamericano*” in English, though peppered with Spanish and Nahuatl, ultimately has the effect of changing its content. However much Latin American Chicana feminist theory may appear to be, it cannot fully capture the lived experience of Latin American women who do not migrate North. It cannot pass for Latin American feminist theory. Cultures or languages are not mutually transparent. A residue, a remainder is always left behind in this attempt at intercultural conversation. Something is always being left out in the act of communication, something is always being lost in translation from one language to another, from one history to another, from one place to another. And what is lost is precisely “*lo latinoamericano*” of Latin America. Surely, the place where theory is conceived matters, even more so when considering recent developments regarding the coloniality of gender taking place in the contexts of the war on terrorism and the global economy.

The postmodern and postcolonial idea that the condition of transnationality and globalizing communicative technologies deterritorializes knowledge should not lead us to think that our positions as subjects are interchangeable and reversible regardless of our locus of enunciation and our colonial difference. To think that Chicana theory articulates the subalternity of the entirety of “*lo latinoamericano*” is to obfuscate the materiality, territoriality, and concretion of the difference of “*lo latinoamericano*” that exists locally.

Latin American feminists who today emerge in the region’s masculinist debates and in the metropolitan academy as the “invisible Others” have to demand their epistemological rights. We must also embark on the project of the decolonization of theory. We need to barge into the dialogues between decolonial theorists and Chicanas. We need to question the conceptual frameworks of metropolitan feminisms, including postcolonial, and above all the theories originating from the apparatus of development.

We must even destabilize our own discourses.

Our allusions to diversity must be re-examined in the light of the coloniality of power and of gender, considering our own place in the system of internal colonization that prevails in our societies. Indigenous and African women still appear on the margins of the text or in a sort of feminist indigenism that seeks to *subsume* the indigenous to the mestizo, to the white, to the Western. We recognize the problem of diversity, of the Indigenous and the Black woman, but we do not consider the problem of the mestiza or the Euro-South American woman. The dialogue among the mestiza, the Euro-South American woman, the Indigenous woman, and the Black woman still shows remnants of a power dialectic where the dominant cultural interlocutor (the mestiza identified with the European cosmology that rejects things Indigenous and African, or the epistemic position of the Euro-South American woman) and the subaltern interlocutor continue to operate. The history of feminist gatherings proves us right. The absence of a conceptual apparatus that accounts for the coloniality of gender in its concatenation with race, class, and sexuality within our societies, and its confabulations with the ultra-right of the global North, are indications of the enormous work that Latin American feminists still have ahead of us.

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Notes

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2 The World Social Forum (WSF) is an annual meeting of civil society organizations, first held in Brazil, that offers a self-conscious effort to develop an alternative future through the championing of counter-hegemonic globalization. <https://transformadora.org/>.

3 Originally *postoccidentalismo*. Today *postoccidentalism* is referred to mostly as *decoloniality*. Although in Spanish both *descolonial* and *decolonial* are in use, the generally agreed upon English translation is *decolonial*.

4 Interestingly, the Spanish Inquisition engaged in far less witch-hunting than in Protestant regions.

5 Translator's note: "lo latinoamericano" refers to all things Latin American, to that particular quality that makes things Latin American.

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