

RETHINKING FEMINIST PEDAGOGY: AN ENGAGED REFLECTION FROM A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso

Translated by Anna Brotman-Krass

I would like to start by thanking LAPES for making possible this space of conversation and for their kind invitation to participate in it. I subscribe to the importance of the creation of networks of knowledge situated and committed to part of politics for a “world where many worlds fit.” I would also like to give thanks to the ancestors that have made it possible for me to be here, especially to the Great Mother Yemayá. Lastly, I would like to once again thank those who shape the shared universe of meaning from which I articulate my feeling-thinking about the world.

I will divide this presentation into three parts. In the first part I will bring here a text that I wrote during the time of the pandemic. It is a reflection about antiracist politics as a liberatory pedagogy and an act of love. Then I will introduce how I conceive, together with other siblings with whom I have been walking and building, what we have called decolonial feminism. Between them is my teacher María Lugones, with whom I always will be indebted to for her teachings. Lastly, I will introduce various elements of the pedagogical practice and how we have been thinking about it and practicing it in our work. That is, as we have gone through different moments of carrying out popular education and more academic education and how this has become a sustained attempt to decolonize educational processes.

ANTI-RACIST POLITICS AS PEDAGOGICAL PROCESS

I begin my reflections by bringing here the words of the character Manduca in the film, the *Embrace of the Serpent*,¹ when he tells Karamakate, the main character: “If the whites don’t learn, it’ll be the end of us.” In a time of political radicalization, it is necessary that we stop thinking about what politics as transformative action could mean and instead think of it as pedagogy. As an educator, I have always noted an inseparability between politics and education. Once the colonial wound is produced that crosses the world in its multiple temporalities and westernizing processes, once the damage is done, the reparation process consists of a politics that centers on the

1 → *Embrace of the Serpent*, directed by Ciro Guerra (Diaphana Films, 2015).

possibility of the creation of consciousness. If there are certainly worlds that prevent *a world where many worlds fit*—as the Zapatista saying goes—then education for transformation is a governing principle and politics is one the spaces through which it is produced.

Contrary to certain positions of the antiracist movement and of contemporary Black feminism that propose the abandonment of the formation of the White privileged subject, I reaffirm the political space as a space of permanent collective growth, where we teach and learn from each other, and where we send messages to the dominant groups that serve to re-educate them. I firmly believe that the discourses Black, Indigenous, and anti-racist activists launch can be messages that help to form new subjects conscious of their place of greater or lesser privilege, and make us aware that we are part of what we confront.

But, of course, anti-racist politics can also be something else, it can refuse to accompany transformation processes. In my experience, I have been a witness to those who in doing anti-racist politics have preferred to take another path: that of which to expel *a priori* all that prevents us from being, all that prevents our world from becoming. The risk is always becoming that which denies us. I recognize that in certain occasions hunting, cutting off heads, may be a necessary act, but I believe that it must be reserved for those extreme occasions where by the first instance other avenues have already been attempted.

This does not mean to think we can avoid the violence of the process of decolonization. This is not possible, as Fanon warned us: “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.”² The confrontation between the world of the colonist and of the colonized, in whatever form we choose, always involves some violence for the one whose privilege is questioned. If the order of things change, there is no way that the produced dis-order cannot be lived as a violence for the colonist; the decolonial action destabilizes and shakes the power that upholds the colonist. In this sense, it is an attack against the colonist and their status. Knowing this; however, this should not lead us to the

2 → Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 35.

false conclusion that everything is the same and that, in politics, anything goes. Contrary to the well-known saying, I believe that the ends do not justify the means. The process carries a message in itself. It is a time in itself that prefigures what we will become: and furthermore, that shows who we are being continuously in the present.

For this reason, in my political practice there is a commitment to the creation of processes, there is a formative intention that is encouraged by the hope that we (un)learn. As part of this duty I have proposed in this frank and open debate, the necessary confrontation with those ideas, ideologies, agendas, and attitudes that maintain a commitment to the global modern colonial system—that which the territorial movements in Latin America have named, “the death model.” This civilizational model permanently updates domination and ethno-terricide³ and in its installation at a global level teaches various ways of being and acting in accordance with what the model needs and expects. These ways are deeply rooted and permeate political practice, as well as the life we make possible in its entirety. Of course, there are those who systematically benefit more than others and it is necessary to unmask those who historically have benefited as a group.

Feminism forms part of a social movement that, for example, has helped ensure that the most privileged group in society is the one that benefits most from the policies it promotes. Like antiracist politics, feminist politics sends particular messages and, in this case, has helped to form a contemporary consciousness whereby women—generally speaking—are the “oppressed,” and men—generally speaking—are “the oppressors.” I myself was indoctrinated into this

3 → The concept of terricide (*terricidio*) has been coined and proposed by the Movimiento Mujeres for Good Living (Movimiento Mujeres por el buen vivir) from Argentina, which unites women from Native communities. They have defined terricide as the “murder of Mother Earth” (“asesinato de la Madre Tierra”). This is “consequence of the dominant model civilizational model. It is framed within the general crisis of capitalism that brings this system to the indiscriminate pillaging of nature’s elements to continue accumulating wealth at the cost of the people, communities, life, ecosystems and spiritual forces [...] Terricide is the violence done to Mother Earth and the dispossession of our communities and of our life on the earth.” Therefore, they propose that terricide be considered a crime against nature and a crime against humanity (“Campamento climático “Pueblos contra el Terricidio”” (2020), available in Spanish at <https://desde-elmargen.net/campamento-climatico-pueblos-contra-el-terricidio/>)

and only lived experience brought me to know the falsity of this statement and its consequences on the lives of the majority of those identified or self-identified as “women.”

Almost two decades ago, with a handful of racialized feminists and others who were not racialized but declare themselves allies, we founded the Latin American Group of Feminist Studies, Training, and Action [El Grupo Latinoamericano de Estudios, Formación, y Acción Feminista (GLEFAS)] and we articulated a critical discourse around this space that searched for, showed, and identified the origin of the problem that we faced within feminist politics. From this space and others that it helped to form, we declared ourselves against all forms of domination and, given the many violent acts received, it proved necessary to declare war on feminism, which, shaped by Black feminism in the 1970s in the US, was called White feminism. The expansion of this analysis showed us the commitment of this feminism to modern civilization’s matrix. I am part, then, of a generation that made an incision in the feminist conceptual and programmatic framework because of its commitment to modernity,⁴ and, therefore, to the continuity of coloniality and racism.

Despite this, I believe declaring war is not waging war, it is merely an act of warning. In the anti-racist politics I develop, the declaration of war, beyond hatred, contains the profound hope for change and reparation. Before waging war, before the expulsion, before the rupture, is the declaration, the respectful and argued denunciation, the rage that turns the message of the wound into a message of reparation. And, needless to say, long before the declaration and denunciation there is a long, long process of intermediation and persistence in the illusion of brotherhood. Only the profound disillusionment with the continuous failure brings you to the denunciation and declaration of war before the court of the collective conscience. Only in the face of the failure of the declaration is the exercise of war itself justified.

4 → Yuderkys Espinosa, *De por qué es necesario un feminismo descolonial* (Barcelona: Icaria, 2021). Edited by Yuderkys Espinosa, Diana Gómez Correal, and Karina Ochoa Muñoz. *Tejiendo de otro modo: Feminismo, epistemología y apuestas descoloniales en Abya Yala* (Popayán: Universidad del Cauca, 2014).

The declaration, then, is the act of warning that reclaims an answer that recognizes the dignity of the assaulted subject. The declaration of war and its denunciation should be directed to open up a debate rather than close one. If what is sought is cancellation, it leaves a glimmer of hope for the possibility of understanding and of transforming. The declaration of war is the war itself, annulling the time and space that should separate them. Big mistake, because in some way we all lose something in war, even when we are victors we have lost something. Violence unleashed in its extreme form, even when justified because there is no other way out, leaves both the victors and the vanquished wounded.

Therefore, I propose that what prevails in a complaint is not the cancellation of the subject, which is more a form of revenge and of an eye-for-an-eye ethic than a principle of justice. In my experience, a declaration of war aims to avoid war, its purpose is to harness the necessary attention to show the wound inflicted in order to learn from it and avoid its repetition. If interpersonal mediation has failed to bring about an acceptance of the harm caused, it is made necessary to turn to the community, to the public forum. As difficult and painful as it may be for both parties, the debate that opens with the warning or the responsible denunciation is part of the formative role played by transformative politics. The debate and the exchange, as difficult as it may be, is pedagogical; is taught and learned on a two-way street. Those of us who participate are all involved in a process of teaching and of learning. We all learn from this debate.

In anti-racist politics, as in any politics, from the get-go we owe a shared responsibility that is never to be forgotten. We share spaces and we do things together. From this coexistence arises the same conflicts that come up in daily life in any community. Sometimes, given the intensity of the moments we share, the lived conflicts become magnified. The speed and the whirlwind of the political moment does not allow the time to clarify misunderstandings, resentments accumulate, and there is little space to reflect and heal the wounds that we inflict on one another.

I have seen many wonderful spaces disappear, brave people

doing harm to themselves due to conflicts or misunderstandings that could have been solved without falling into disqualification and mutual, or one-sided, cancellation. I am very aware of this in my own practice. In what way have I contributed to the reported situation? What is it that actually causes me discomfort? Is the violence that I feel and that has harmed me a reaction to the violence that I have exercised, or is this unfair? Is my response disproportionate to what has hurt me, and have I caused greater harm than what has been done unto me? Is my ego playing a trick on me and not admitting the mistake or limits of the other? Is this repetitive or sporadic behavior? Is it just me, or many others? Do I seek revenge or collective healing? These are questions I usually ask myself and that have helped me to know when I should ask for forgiveness or when I should expect apologies from others; when I should join the learning process of the person who has hurt me, or when I should simply move on to a more confrontational and aggressive stage to stop the harm done to me or to others.

We live in a time where I witness how resources and political discourses are used in irresponsible and abusive ways to legitimize hidden intentions of revenge, spite, or annulment of the other. It is sad but it must be said and we must understand that when denunciation covers up the real reason for discomfort and it feels necessary to lie or accuse others on the basis of general arguments, the possibility for collective healing is hindered. It hinders it because it generally does not search for it. To heal is to learn, and all parties must be willing to self-reflect. Reparative anti-racist politics are politics that look at themselves as spaces of learning. I firmly believe that in any problem or conflict, it must be remembered that we all have our dark sides, that we all have our limits and flaws. It is necessary to know oneself as faulty before deciding what is not tolerable, what does not deserve or is not worth expecting anything, and what should be expelled or destroyed before it destroys me / us.

But before we reach war or expulsion, we must debate, confront, train, and accompany. We must give the other the same opportunity to learn and to grow that has been granted to us and that we expect to

be granted. For this reason, I claim that it is an impulse of love to search for the world's transformation in order to create something better from. Let us not fool ourselves, the feminist anti-racist politics—that from which I speak, that which I know and that is important to me—is a formative policy.

Before anything else, we are educators in a continuous process of development. Those of us that put our dark bodies, our experiences, and our words in front of an auditorium full of White feminists, or retrograde nationalists, or left- or right-wing misogynists, are educating others at the same time that we are educating ourselves. When we declare war, when we shout out our hate, when we say *enough!*, we are educating. We educate to make the world a better place, thinking of our actions as educational or pedagogical gestures that liberate us from the temptation to make our efforts a simple act of destruction. We seek to transform power relations. And if power relations constitute us, then the transformation to which we contribute and to which we submit ourselves occurs at all levels. We are transformed in this coming and going in the eagerness to change hierarchical structures and subjugation.

The activist is a teacher that can do her task of accompanying others in their transformation processes either well or poorly. The activist-teacher herself is continuously learning, stumbling all of the time. Her best weapon is her humility to accept this condition of knowing very little. Thus, the activist-teacher turns into an apprentice and becomes, just like the world she intends to change, something better than what she was before entering politics.

Politics, then, is always a formative process. We enter politics in one way and finish in another. We cannot fall into the trap of denying the intermediation process as part of the politics that seeks to make the world something better. Things change in the exchange. Many teachers remind us that no one learns alone, nor does anyone educate alone. The man does not disappear when we do not look him in the face, and neither does the racist. It is for this reason that we are suspicious of expulsion. The banishment of the canceled subject is not the disappearance of the problem. The canceled subject is simply

the proof that something is rotten, that something must be addressed, that something is not working right in the community. Of course, there will be moments when we are left with no other option, but before then, there is much to do.

There is an ethical task to be done to actively involve ourselves in order to change what is hurt and repair it. This task must involve all of us. There is the task of the activist and there is a responsibility of those who are denounced. To assume politics is a pedagogical task is to believe that if we do not educate the evil subject, it will end up exterminating us. Even when we expel or assassinate this subject, its disease will propagate like a plague and devour us. Anti-racist politics should always be an act of love, a love for ourselves and for our community, a love for the communities that are not my own, and a love for the relationships between all that exists. We must remember that if the White subject does not learn, it will be the end of us, as quoted in [*Embrace of the Serpent*].⁵ We must also remember that it will be the end of us if we do not see how the White master lives within us, and thus politics is about transformative self-formation.

DECOLONIAL FEMINISM AS A PLACE OF EXPRESSION

Now, from where am I speaking? All that I have just said, from where am I saying it? I effectively come from a long lineage of Latin American and Caribbean feminism. I entered feminism starting in my early twenties while in college. I come from a working class and impoverished family, and I am one of the first of my family to go to college. This was one of the dreams of my Black father, who was very determined that his daughter and sons go to college in the hopes of improving the family situation.

My father was one of my first teachers. It was he who taught me to think about the world, articulate myself in the first person, and responsibly create my own destiny. That is what I do. In spite of this, it was a long way before I came to recognize myself and my father as racialized people. My father never recognized himself as a Black man,

5 → Guerra, *Embrace of the Serpent*.

and it was never mentioned nor spoken about in the family. I come from a family of revolutionaries, from folks who believe in social justice, but there was no race consciousness. In discourse and in concerns, only class took precedence.

So, when I arrived at college, I was already educated with an anti-classist and anti-capitalist consciousness. Beyond that, I already had strong training in assuming myself as a historical subject responsible for my actions before my society and before my life. I had a deep awareness of the fundamental ethical principles of honesty, transparency, and constant self-criticism that have accompanied me my whole life. I was trained in a permanent task with myself. So, when I encountered feminism, it was a turning point. I was already prepared for politics, and I have assumed it with passion as I do with everything in my life. To encounter feminism was to let myself be educated by it. To let myself be educated by feminism was to develop a gender consciousness. In my personal history, this will mean about ten to fifteen more years of denying a fundamental part of my background. It was actively engaging in politics that diminished my experience and diminished my gaze because it was Dominican. It was staying tucked in a silence and denying an important part of myself. There was something that escaped all the theories I had at my disposal.

When I went to live in Argentina in 2001, I arrived full of illusions of getting integrated in a radical, autonomous, and international feminist movement. Argentina was the country in the spotlight illuminating the feminist movement in Latin America. It is there where I crashed, fell flat on my face, and all expectations fell. No one had to tell me when I reached the stage where the disillusionment finally arrived because I lived it all.

There I discovered feminism as an absolutely Eurocentric, racist space where a person like me, a Dominican woman, was never going to be someone who thought or who wrote about the world, but rather a body of a whore. And it is not that it is a problem to be a whore. The problem was the condemnation and prejudice that accompanies that supposition, where your body is no longer good for anything. And so I began to try to find something that would put a word to the wound that

was constantly being re-actualized time and time again. That is how I came to Black and of color feminism in the United States, and very quickly I was able to get into this thing which was emerging in Latin America, which was the decolonial shift.

We began to construct decolonial feminism in Latin America with Ochy Curiel. With her, we arrived at autonomous Latin American feminism. Autonomous feminism was a movement in the 1990s that produced one of the most powerful critiques of the process of the institutionalization of feminism in Latin America and the Caribbean. This movement was strongly influenced by Italian, French, and Spanish feminisms. This practice was very much linked to autonomous and original thinking about the world. “Bring the world to the world,” said feminists from the philosophical group *Diotima*, committed to finding “one’s own voice.” While this voice was determined by what they signaled as given fact—sexual difference—their methodology of looking for and engaging with one’s own thinking about the world reminded me a lot of what I had learned from my father at an early age. It was a continuation, let’s say, of this way of thinking.

From the autonomous feminist standpoint, we strongly criticized the technocratization and the institutionalization of regional feminism, the co-optation of feminist leadership, influence-peddling, and the hegemonic feminist agenda defined and promoted at the international level by the mechanisms of the United Nations and the multilateral instances of so-called “development aid.” From our stance amidst a moment of an onslaught of neoliberalism and of a new globalization where we observe its consequences for our countries, and in particular for women in the public sectors, we are committed to creating our own form of thought and denouncing imperialist dependence of Latin American and Caribbean feminism on feminism of the Global North and on discourses emanating from central loci of power. It was definitely a first great school where many of us learned to produce a critical gaze towards the world.

However, at a certain point, this autonomous feminism revealed its limits. In a previous work, using my well-known method of

“genealogy of experience,” I revisit my memories and the archives of this moment to find the sources of what ended up separating us:

For the end of the decade in the 1990s of the last century and in the first decade of the twenty-first century, autonomous feminism found itself worn out due to, among other things, the discredit to which institutionalized hegemonic feminism had condemned us, the lack of resources (thanks to our critical stance towards cooperative funding agendas), and, lastly, the internal disputes regarding leadership and the political project. Although the critique of the institutionalization and the NGO-ization of feminism had brought us together, important differences between us began to appear after a decade. Autonomous feminists who had paved the way and started the movement in the late 1980s found it challenging to recognize the contributions and leadership of those of us who would join just a few years later. The difficulty of getting to know each other was marked by differences with respect to political alliances and the way in which we positioned ourselves in the social fabric.

In the background, these different politics were marked by class difference, race, and origin. These differences that separated us so deeply functioned in a hidden way without becoming part of political reflection and struggle. Thus, while autonomist feminists who were racialized and / or came from the working class were convinced of the necessity to accompany collective struggles of the people and organized communities, in a time when social and territorial movements were making a strong reappearance amidst the profound crisis of the 1990s due to the structural adjustment measures and the readjustment of world economic policy that required neoliberalism, old-fashioned autonomous feminism situated in politics of sexual difference. These old-fashioned autonomous feminists indicated the need to keep away from the social outburst, proclaiming a “feminism from the outside” in the voice from one of its most important representatives, the Chilean feminist Margarita Pisano.⁶

It is worth noting that this difference was not minor if we take into account the origin of a good part of the movement that made it

6 → Margarita Pisano, “El Afuera” <https://www.mpisano.cl/el-afuera/>

impossible for us to stay outside broad struggles for social justice in our communities.

In this way, by the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, autonomists found ourselves walking paths that internally separated us. In 2009, the group which had agreed on the need to broaden the autonomist feminist struggle assuming a commitment with women from grassroots and mixed movements where they found themselves immersed, decided to organize an autonomist feminist assembly in Mexico City, taking advantage of the fact that some of them would participate in the XI Feminist Assembly of Latin America [XI Encuentro Feminista de América Latina y El Caribe (EFLAC)] to be held in that city. The meeting in Mexico united many of us who had participated in the autonomist workshop that occurred during the 7th EFLAC in Chile in 1996. This was a space where trends were set and where new generations of activists from the work sector from different countries came together, and, despite the fragmentation and the generalized discredit by hegemonic feminism, several of us who were there and are now in leadership roles, continued to do. Given the character of this intermediate generation, its political composition and vision, the meeting in Mexico showed some broadened areas of concern and problematization towards the social fabric as a whole, which categorically marked some differences with feminist autonomy in the 1990s led by white-*Mestiza* middle class women from the previous generation. This indicated a definitive rupture with the old-school autonomous feminism that would lead, not long after, to the surge of two of the most relevant feminist movements in the last decades: community feminism and decolonial feminism. In the closing statement of the meeting, “Make Community in the Home of Difference” (“Hacer Comunidad en la Casa de las Diferencias”⁷), they showed the foundations of the political agenda underway and were leading us down new paths. The decolonial anti-racist feminist that I am today was about to enter the world.

The shift that would bring us to decolonial feminism would be

7 → Feministas Autónomas, “Una declaración feminista autónoma: El desafío de hacer comunidad en la casa de las diferencias,” *Debate Feminista* 41 (Spring 2010): 202-207. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42625144>

complete once Black and of color feminist thought in the United States would enter the scene, as would the project of modernity and colonial critique. Black and of color feminist theory in the United States would introduce words to the wound produced by the racism intrinsic to feminist theory and the feminist movement threaded into the social fabric. This is a wound that every generation of racialized feminists in *América Ladina*⁸ have silently suppressed and that, thanks to the pioneering work we have done since the 1990s—but especially in the most recent developments of anti-racist feminism in the last decade—is now less painful today. Black and of color feminist theory would allow us to problematize the fragmented understanding of the domination present in social theory and in our social movements, specifically in feminism and in sex-gender liberation movements. The so-called decolonial shift would provide us with a new discourse to name the colonial wound and its emergence in the social order, looking at race as an idea that organizes the globalized world.

For us,⁹ decolonial feminism is a growing movement that forms part of a larger critical trajectory which I have coined as Eurocentric feminist reason (*razón feminista eurocentrada*) in my analysis.¹⁰ Our contribution has been centered on defining and showing feminism's commitment to coloniality, Euro-modernity, and racial capitalism, as well as observing and making visible the many modes of resistance to domination by racialized women and their communities. Making visible the many modes of resistance that Afro-descendant and Native women allows us to reinstate our agency as historical subjects

8 → The term *América Ladina*, coined by the Afro-Brazilian intellectual Lélia Gonzalez, seeks to make explicitly visible the presence of [Afro-descendants and Indigenous folks] and *mestizo* populations in Nuestra América's social project, and claim this plural ancestry from which we were dispossessed." (Translated from Spanish <https://lasaweb.org/es/lasa2020/>)

9 → When I say "us" in this text, I am fundamentally referring to my comrades who are part of the Latin American Group for Feminist Studies, Training, and Action (GLEFAS), with whom I develop my ideas and with whom I have walked and grown. Current members of GLEFAS include Ochy Curiel, Carmen Cariño, Celenis Rodríguez, Iris Hernández, Aymara Llanque, Evelin Martínez, Mar Daza, Evelyn Carrasco, and Bienvenida Mendoza. Former GLEFAS members include María Lugones, Breny Mendoza, and Aura Cumes, among others.

10 → Espinosa-Miñoso, 2021.

and dismantle the operation that intends to show us as objects of feminist action, an action aimed at fulfilling promises of the individual liberation of the modern project. Being coherent with these aims, we do not adjudicate ourselves as a substantive originality, but rather, we recognize ourselves in a larger trajectory of struggle and resistance of racialized women and those worlds from which we come, worlds that have been denied within feminist and modern European history.

There is an important thing that I want to leave on the table on the subject of the debates and reflections generated in this symposium. From the outside, we often fail to see the differences within the movements. Decolonial feminism is a field of dispute and it would be a mistake to see it as homogenous. In reality, I see decolonial feminism as a field of tension and conflict from which emanates the possibility of its permanent revision. It would be a grave mis-reading to homogenize and overlook internal conflicts, tensions, positions, and debates that are situated at the heart of the basic tenets underlying decolonial feminism and that illuminate the projects of the society we desire.

As a researcher and thinker, one of my commitments has been in helping to construct a subaltern memory of feminism in Latin America and this means being able to explain how hegemony is produced within social movements and protest movements. To have experienced and been involved in social and feminist movements for several decades has shown and warned us of the production of hierarchies and power from inside and outside our spaces of activism. Recognizing the ways in which hegemony forms from within a movement helps us on the journey to refrain from repeating the abuse, injustice, and errors that we denounce out there on the ground. This means that, for us, to think of the feminist and decolonial feminist fields requires fine-tuning. It is imperative to evaluate the ways in which practices, ideas, projects, tactics, discourses, and problematizations are defined in such a way that they emerge from horizontal debate and dialogue, from the search for consensus, and from the responsible commitment to action. The method I have developed and named “genealogy of experience” (“genealogía de la

experiencia")¹¹ has allowed me to draw on the experience of activism and of the political struggle to interrogate it by promoting what we do when we do feminist politics. What political model, feminist or otherwise, decolonial or otherwise, reactivates modernity's program of liberation? And, in what way does it disobey its assumptions, putting restitution programs of fragmented bonds of life into action, an indispensable condition to assure good living no longer only for women or of neglected subjects, but of all that exists? These are key questions that we ask ourselves in a time when decolonial feminism is being enunciated in many places, to the point that we can risk forgetting the subaltern history that has produced this movement.

POLITICAL TRAINING AS A TOOL FOR DECOLONIAL FEMINISM

Returning to the question on pedagogical labor of anti-racist and decolonial politics, I refer to the work group from which I come, GLEFAS. In GLEFAS, we recently were thinking about how to produce a feminist movement from the ground up. In fact, this was one of the main objectives that led to GLEFAS's foundation. We sought to support critical reflective processes on political practice, asking ourselves: how can we strengthen and improve our movements so that their actions are directed towards the ends of justice and good living that we claim to procure? This question is closely linked to knowledge production, to epistemic justice and to foundations of the world we dream of. What knowledge for what world? Which methodologies for what knowledge? In what ways do truths produced by a handful of women with privilege, thanks to their class of origin and race, sustain and orient our feminist practices? How are the truths that sustain our liberation practices and projects committed to the principles of European modernity's model citizen? How do these principles counteract principles of good living in relationship that underlie other social orders and thereby condemn the majority of women and neglected subjects and communities of life from which they proceed to a regime of systematic oppression, violence, and

11 → Espinosa-Yuderkeys, 2019

disappearance? In what way, ultimately, do our practices contribute to or challenge the growth of this model of death?

For us, this meant we had to assume the need for political education as the only way to strip the web of hegemonic meanings and dismantle predefined agendas and strategies imposed from above by modern Occidental reasoning. From the start, we have been committed to popular education and education that decolonizes at different levels of the social fabric. We were convinced of the need to place in the hands of activists and folks in communities under worse conditions of privilege the conceptual-theoretical tools that usually are not at their / our disposal. This way, we can approach the views our communities produce, track the approaches that permeate our analyses, produce our own perspectives, and refine social analysis and evaluate our political practices. We began to formulate and offer online and in-person training programs directed by activists and actors committed during a time when no one was talking about neither decolonial feminism nor anti-racist politics. We designed and organized courses about racism, gender and sexuality, anti-racist movements and thought, the coloniality of gender, decolonial feminism, etc. GLEFAS saw this as part of a strategy to strengthen and transform our politics. Without a doubt, our contributions took part in shaping new generations of feminists with anti-racist and decolonial perspectives. One very important element for us is that anti-racist and decolonial education and training is not only a training centered on defining a political subject, but rather on defining a political project. Therefore, the political and educational politics we give is an involved politic that does not pretend to be neutral, which effectively makes different perspectives known, but takes a side.

That means to combat the idea that Black feminism can be done by any Black woman or Black subject. The political formation we offer and the perspectives that we want to contribute to are aware of the dangers of essentialism. For us, it is always about thinking about political projects that contribute to make practices more effective. Although we cannot forget the materiality of bodies and the conditions of possibilities of the lives of those who carry these bodies,

we are convinced that what unites us are the principles that define society to that which we aspire and the way in which they guide our practices and are solidified into today's actions. In this way, our training shows its participants the limits and the contradictions of our Black anti-racist, sex-gender, and queer feminist movements, as well as the projects of contemporary leftists.

There are some concepts we handle and that become fundamental for this critique. Some of these are the modern colonial world-system, the idea of race, coloniality of being, epistemic coloniality, capitalism, Eurocentrism, coloniality of Eurocentric feminist reasoning, the modern colonial system of gender, the matrix of domination, relational and entangled ontologies, colonial gender technologies, the anthropology of domination, ancestralism, community, communality and reproduction of the commons, and feel-think, among others. This vocabulary has been made throughout the years thanks to our own contributions, meetings among decolonial feminists and other committed theories and with community-driven knowledge, and above all, our capacity for openness and permeability to experience and knowledge. The training we provide introduces participants to this common vocabulary and to the meanings it enables for other politics.

To conclude, I want to offer some methodological reflections on the political education we propose.

TOWARDS A DECOLONIAL FEMINIST EDUCATION FOR THE PEOPLE

The feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s of the last century in Latin America and in the Caribbean was, in general, a movement committed to popular struggles and against dictatorships. Many of those who formed its ranks came from or were dually militant with the leftists of the era. At the same time, it is worth saying that in large part, it was composed of *White* and *White-Mestiza* women that came from a political and / or economic literate elite. Committed as they were to class struggle and struggles for democratization, they saw in

education for liberation, as it would be named by their mentor, Paulo Freire, a methodology that could serve the purpose of making the common woman (workers, housewives, farmers, etc.) conscientize about class and gender-based oppression. They announced this as their objective.

However, what is true is that much of what they did those years was around educating women in popular and subaltern sectors on the fundamental truths elaborated by feminist theory, a feminist theory produced and led by literate, middle class, and upper middle class women in the US and in Europe. Let it be said that their class consciousness led them to believe in the need to work with those with less privilege, and their gender consciousness led them to claim that all women were equally oppressed by the patriarchy and (given their class consciousness) that they should have been educated since they were marginalized by the patriarchy. This situation would worsen as their interests and the interests of those funding them changed towards the end of the decade in the 1990s, when class consciousness faded and the majority of our feminists became development aid and gender policy technicians in the new neoliberal stage of capitalism. Concretely, the use they made of popular education was limited and narrow. In fact, the popular feminist educators were trained in the use of participatory techniques, but along the way, we left behind what was fundamental: validating the knowledge of the common woman and betting on its reconstruction. It was a matter of bringing to her, through their techniques, that which feminism had produced about what was the problem women faced. It has to do with what some of us postcolonial and decolonial feminists have called the salvationist zeal of feminism.¹² We went to the communities and neighborhoods to tell the impoverished, Afro-descendant, and Indigenous women there how they needed to interpret their domination. This interpretation was centered on gender and patriarchy as the origin of our domination and we spoke of a “we, the women.”

In some of my works I point to how this feminist task of educating

12 → Sirín Adlbi Sibai, *La cárcel del feminismo. Hacia un pensamiento islámico decolonial*, (Madrid: Aka, 2016).

through the lens of gender contributes to the expansion of modernity as a civilizing paradigm. This popular feminist education, not questioning the ontoepistemic bases of its truths, helped install and naturalize the idea of the free and sovereign subject that modern capitalism produces, as an emancipatory ideal for women:

These participatory and liberation methodologies helped expand the idea of gender as the fundamental category to explain the domination of women and have contributed to installing the idea of a liberated woman as one who emulates the standard and model of life of a white European woman, middle class, educated, professional, urban, and integrated into the consumption model.¹³

In an interview, I had been asked about a point I made about this known and globally expanded feminism where a housewife, a domestic worker, an agricultural worker, or a countrywoman is not a liberated woman.¹⁴ This is something that should be abandoned, it is something that we need to leave behind, because it is shameful.

What attempts do decolonial feminists make to transform this feminist pedagogy? How do we intend to decolonize it? For us, a decolonial feminist pedagogy implies a process of starting by questioning domination by racist, colonial, capitalist and by modern colonial system of gender. This means to put into question the basic principles of modernity: the ideas that progress and linear construction of history; the human-non-human, nature-culture, modern-not modern, civilization-barbarian, and man-woman dichotomies. What do I want to say with this? What feminism teaches

13 → Espinosa-Miñoso, Yuderkys, "De por qué es necesario un feminismo descolonial: diferenciación, dominación coconstitutiva de la modernidad occidental y el fin de la política de identidad," *Revista Solar. Revista de Filosofía Iberoamericana* 12, no. 1 (2017): 141.

14 → Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, "El ideal de mujer del feminismo implica la explotación de la mayoría de mujeres y varones extraeuropeos" Interview by Amanda Andrades. *Revista CTXT: Contexto y Acción*, August 28, 2020, Web, <https://ctxt.es/es/20200801/Politica/33177/yuderkys-espinosa-feminismo-colonialismo-amanda-andrades.htm#:~:text=En%20pocas%20palabras%2C%20para%20el,no%20es%20una%20mujer%20liberada.>

us is that here, all of us women are oppressed and all men are oppressors, and that women have to come together against our greatest threat, which is men. Popular decolonial feminist education should be able to help dismantle this type of simultaneously universalist and fragmented analysis. Take a man who is a street sweeper, who cleans the street, who cleans your house, or the migrant from the Caribbean in the North who does not dare to call himself a domestic worker but is doing that kind of work there. What is his place in the world in relation to the woman who employs him? Thus, we seek to overcome the categorical gaze to produce a complex historical gaze of the present. We rely on the critiques and inputs of theories and thinking produced by intellectuals who are generally hidden by feminist theorization. We are also interested in collective knowledge. How do our communities produce knowledge? How do we give value to this knowledge? What does the ninety year-old grandmother or the Black butch lesbian of a peripheral neighborhood of Santo Domingo have to say?

While we pay attention to a methodology that begins with knowledge that the masses bring and takes them seriously in order to facilitate in the processes of becoming aware of the discourses that we repeat and the truths we believe in, we appeal to reconstruct the community knowledge that supports good living and that we support its deepening and systematization by putting thought produced by intellectuals from the subaltern into the hands of the masses. We help to rearticulate views and understandings of domination, starting from institutions and experiences. Then, we see how they serve a co-constitutive critique and analysis of the matrix of domination. Critique of European modernity as a globally-imposed civilizing matrix endangering epistemic multiplicity is fundamental as a starting point.

For us, this popular transformational decolonial education makes fundamental:

- the revaluation of collective, popular, and ancestral knowledge,
- to systematize in order to recuperate,
- to historize in order to understand the present, and to

construct another history that is critical of power and oppression,

- to unlearn truths produced by the ruling classes,
- to update and provide feedback starting from knowledge and experiences from other communities that have also suffered domination,
- the reconstruction of the history of resistance

Resistance becomes the center of our formation. In what ways have we always resisted domination and attempts to annihilate us? It is ultimately about returning the condemned to their place in the world as historical agents. These histories of resistance are always veiled because we have been led to believe that we need the modern enlightenment agenda to liberate us and to evolve.

The last point becomes fundamental for the pedagogy we are developing. It has to do with the objective that we are aiming for, the political agenda that we are betting on, an agenda that we have learned from the struggles of the organized communities themselves. The end goal of politics and resistance is to maintain, where its removal has not been achieved, and to restore, where it is agonizing, the communal ties besieged and when not, broken or wounded due to the advancement of the processes of westernization, which includes the processes of westernization brought by feminism. To strengthen, not the individual self, but rather the collective self as a guarantee of good living for all that exists and; therefore, for the women with the least privilege. ■

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