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Women in Academia Crossing North-South Borders: Gender, Race, and Displacement
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Reviewed by Penka Skachkova, 2017

Exceptional historic times demand knowledge and knowers that go beyond the trivial and push the canon toward visibility of marginality as well as show the way to epistemic resistance and justice. *Women in Academia Crossing North-South Borders* embodies this push. It is a collective effort of seven migrant women academics, mostly from Latin America, who teach in different disciplines at universities in Australia, Europe, and Chile. The narrators use personal reflections and academic scholarship to dissect gender, racial, ethnic, and national hierarchies and inequalities in academia in the Global North that are problematized through migration. The authors' collective framework draws on Aníbal Quijano's understanding of coloniality, Enrique Dussel's work on Eurocentrism, and Linda Alcoff's theory of visible identities, among other scholarship in the areas of epistemology, postcolonial feminism, modernity/coloniality/decoloniality, and studies of identities (Dussell 1993; Alcoff 2006; Quijano 2007).

Divided into chapters of each narrator's story of crossing borders and discovering her new social identity, the goal of the project is to bring visibility to Latin American women's experiences of "disruptions, relocations and dislocations" as well as "to facilitate an alternative path to the logic of knowledge as commodity" (Arashiro and Barahona, vii). By reflecting on and narrating the intersection among biographies, national histories, and academic careers in the Global North, the authors offer fresh perspectives on the ways their individual stories have been shaped by race, gender, politics, colonialism, and larger sociohistorical processes. Taking a critical stand against diversity understood as "mute" and passive multiculturalism, and against universal subjectivity that attributes migrant women's differences to "*deficit*, and very seldom on equal terms" (x), the authors articulate the construction/reconstruction of their Otherness as ranked humanity and knowledge in the "borders of hegemonic academic systems" (x). From migrant women academics' vantage point, the modern/colonial university is not neutral, objective, or de-politicized. Instead, it is "a geopolitical system of knowledge that dictates those whose knowledge is transmitted from local to universal, and separates them from the many other subjects who can only count as objects or providers of "stories" (xii). In fact, for the authors, academia has become not only a marker of race, gender, and national difference but also a site within which they "have experienced growing awareness of contradictions and built resistance" (xiii). Drawing on their simultaneous inside/outside position and "double-consciousness associated with migration and exile," the authors further enrich scholarship about the "epistemic weakness and patriarchal nature of the universal subject" (xii). More than just being aware of their visible identities, the authors question the social and epistemological systems in which they participate. By practicing solidarity in protest against racial, patriarchal, and colonial systems of oppressions, the narrators outline a paradigm of "experimental engagement with how global power operates" (xii) and urge that "resisting the model and practice of the corporate university" is a necessity (vii), not a privilege.

Women's epistemologies of difference and protest are created through their "movement across borders, through the loss of privileges and the discovery of [their] Otherness in new social hierarchies" (x). In each chapter, "movement," "loss," and "discovery" structure the

authors' personal narratives into what could be perceived as stages of "remembrance," "shifting," and "resistance." They call to mind Frantz Fanon's framework of the three phases of development of a colonized "native intellectual" (assimilation, self discovery, revolution) and Teshome Gabriel's theory of development of third-world films (unqualified assimilation, remembrance phase, combative phase) (Fanon 1963; Gabriel 2011).

In the first stage of remembrance, the authors reflect on their racial, gender, and national backgrounds and experiences before migration to the Global North. For them, the epistemology of difference depends on the sociopolitical context within which it is created and processed. All of the narrators are connected to Latin America: Rosalba Icaza and Marisol Reyes are from Mexico; Malba Barahona is from Chile; Jeanne Simon is a white American who migrated to Chile; Sara Motta is Polish-Jewish-Colombian born in the UK; Eugenia Demuro is from Argentina; and Zuleika Arashiro is Okinawan-Brazilian. The authors' Latin American backgrounds bring to light the colonial and imperial foundation of their identities and knowledge since their national and racial origins are intersected by politics and power. As articulated by the authors, the "colonized South" defines migrant women's initial locations as the "weaker side of power" (Reyes), renders them "invisible," and reduces their authenticity to "indigeneity" that is understood in the North as "inferiority, underdevelopment, primitivism" (Barahona, 55). Understandably, the authors identify as "ontologically Other from the beginning and marked as a raced and gendered subject of coloniality" (89), "knowing-subject of coloniality as wounded" (91), and "in-between multiple oppressions" (Motta, 95).

In the next stage of shifting, the authors reflect on the transformation of their locations, identities, and knowledge as a result of migration. The narrators perceive travel mostly as emancipation and freedom. Location becomes a borderland space that nurtures epistemological possibilities (Motta). Through their "epistemic pilgrimage" (Icaza) and "epistemological exile" (Motta), the authors undertake the task of unlearning the colonial burden of their education acquired before migrating to the North (Barahona, Demuro, Motta). They develop a double consciousness and start to question authenticity, privilege, power, and hierarchies in academia. The authors object to invisibility and draw strength from their silence. Similarly to Paulo Freire's framework (Freire 1968), the authors do not shy away from their silence but use it as a site of struggle (Motta). This is parallel to finding their voices through sharing personal experiences and employing the methods of auto-ethnography and autobiography. The narrators focus on developing a dialogue through which they become selves-in-transformation. Although dialogue is a powerful tool in constructing their identities in the borderland spaces, Motta thinks that hybrid identities need, instead, a monologue, and she uses poetry to center her experience.

Resistance is the third stage of women's identity and knowledge-development. In opposition to "the production and reproduction of 'utilitarian' academic work" (viii) of publishing and receiving grants, imposed by the modern/colonial university, the authors subvert academic hierarchies and privileges, and prioritize teaching. As teachers, the authors participate in a "dialogue of knowledges" (Icaza, 12) and build "epistemic bridges" between the South and western European/American knowledge (Reyes, 29) and other communities (Barahona, 62). Connected to their national origins through personal backgrounds and experiences, the authors find that "the visibility of epistemologies of the South--ways of knowing, being, and sensing the world that come from the incarnated experience of colonial difference--has been crucial in the classroom" (Icaza, 19). Employing epistemic travel, the authors further transform "from expert-teacher[s] into . . . listener[s]" (Icaza, 12). They also embrace a "praxis of plurality" ("a world in which many worlds fit"), proposed by the Zapatista (xiv). More so, the

lessons learned from the Zapatista help migrant academic women to challenge the modern/colonial university despite personal discomfort, "fear of breaking disciplinary rules of conduct, and putting at risk academic recognition by potential peers" (vii). In this way, women's epistemology of difference is enriched and further developed by an epistemology of academic disobedience.

As a result, *Women in Academia* is not simply a compilation of separate reflections on the coloniality, patriarchy, production, and politics of academic knowledge in the Global North, as they are experienced by migrant women academics. Probably the book would not have even been published if it had been proposed as an individual effort--a privilege still reserved mostly for male scholars. One of the main advantages of *Women in Academia* is that it is a product of vibrant, collective solidarity. The authors' narratives break with the epistemological tradition and construct a community of "tertulias," "co-labor," "we-us" that weaves "collaborative decolonizing women's voices and experiences" (Barahona).

Another original contribution of the book is that the Latin American aspect of women's experiences is analyzed not within the US but in the Australian context, where most of the authors are located. Unlike its construction and representation in US scholarship, Latin America is less historically and culturally connected to Australia, and Latin American migrants are less visible as a minority in Australia, in general, and in their universities, in particular. This allows for comparisons of what it means to be Latin American in different contexts in the Global North. Meanwhile, the sociohistorical and epistemological connection to the US is not ignored. Moreover, the US is seen as part of a complex, global, multi-angle construction of the authors' standpoints.

This Latin America-US-Australia line of transformation of the authors' knowledge and identities is an important contribution of the book since it advances the understanding of what I call "mestization" of the modern corporate university. Historically, crossing borders and exchanging ideas and scholars have been the core of intellectual life. With increased professional migration after World War II, academics from Latin America have continuously enriched scholarship and pedagogy in the Global North. However, as the authors argue, there has been systemic epistemic violence from the North to erase knowledge possessed by Latin American migrant women or to replace it with one-sided accounts that create and reproduce superficial stereotypes about Latin America (viii). Instead, the authors aim to register and validate a plurality of women's voices that challenge the "homogenizing power of capitalism" practiced in the modern/colonial university: "We inscribe our bodies, experiences, thoughts, and emotions in the analysis of our reality, not as a celebration of individual narratives, but to call attention, as academics, to the epistemic violence perpetuated through homogenizing perspectives" (xiv). By taking a critical stance against monolithic perspectives, the narrators further develop identity theory by offering identifications such as "mestizo-feminist-woman-of Southern origin" and "female-heterosexual-Mexican-mestiza-feminist-mother" (Icaza).

However, this "mestization" of academia is not seen in linear terms. Simon (American-born teaching in Chile) points out that authenticity is not simply a self-representation, but a disruption. She explains that her white American privilege, for example, shifted when she went to Africa and also when she joined her Chilean husband in his native country. Simon criticizes linear insider-outsider epistemologies and insists, instead, on an understanding of a double movement of inclusion and exclusion.

With this said, *Women in Academia* could have articulated more the specific characteristics of the modern colonial university. The authors could also have broadened their scope of

reference and incorporated scholarship by academics from diverse racial and national backgrounds, not only those from Latin America. W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness or Patricia Hill Collins's "outsider within" theory would have been very useful (Du Bois 1903; Collins 1990). Furthermore, although the authors do not claim to be "subaltern" (ix), they could have drawn on Gayatri Spivak's critique of the modern/colonial "teaching machine" (Spivak 1993).

Legitimizing marginal women's voices, articulating shifting knowledge patterns and identities, and showing the epistemological alternative of protest are important contributions of *Women in Academia*. They make the book very contemporary and needed in view of current US and global contexts of erasure and oppression of epistemological difference and diverse identities. Deeply emotional and inspirational, the book also stands out as a rebellious manifesto against authoritarian regimes, and is a must read for anyone who is interested in epistemic and social justice.

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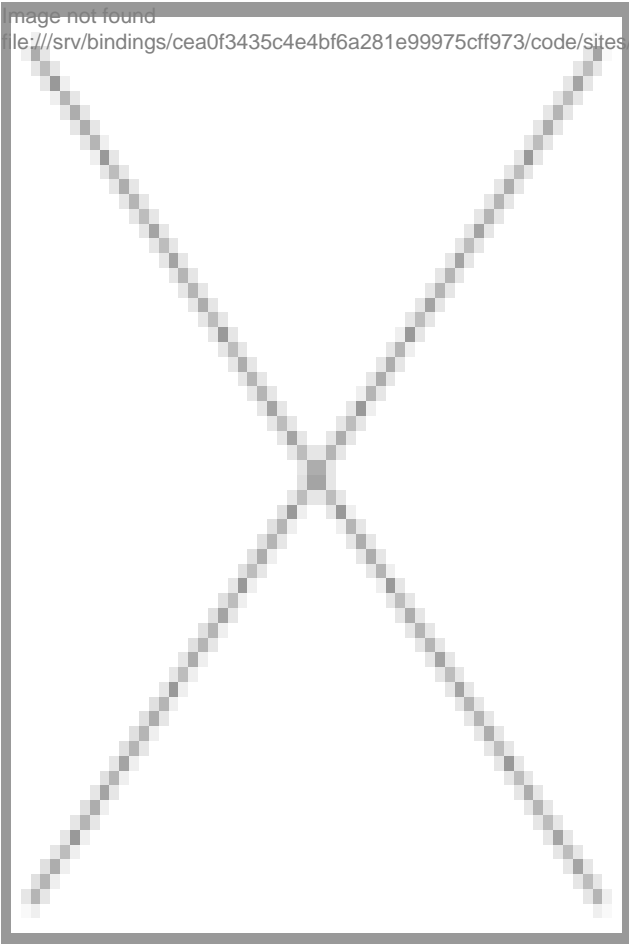
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