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### DECOLONIZATION AND THE QUESTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

#### Gender, race, and binary thinking

*The construction and performance of gender and gender relations has been paramount to the process of Decolonization. Gender has permeated the discourses and enactments of colonization and is an inseparable part of the casting of subjectivity through the colonality of power. The notions of femininity and masculinity are themselves colonial constructs that have pressed more complex notions of gender, sexuality, and desire into a binary. The treatment of gender in three approaches to decolonization (Nelly Richard's cultural theory, Mujeres Creando's lesbian street performance, indigenous movement's written and audiovisual discourse) help to discern how gender and the colonality of power are articulated and in how far these efforts at decolonization unwork colonial legacies. Richard challenges the geopolitics of knowledge. As she claims the specificity of Latin American heterogeneity as a place from which to theorize she also guards against essentialist notions of gender. The conflicts underlying gender heterogeneity, however, are glossed over. The discourses of indigenous movements debate concepts of gender complementarity while, at the same time, using gender complementarity as a template for thinking decolonized relations. Yet, gender here remains caught in the Andean paradigm of duality. Mujeres Creando call attention to the conflicts underlying heterogeneity without essentializing notions of woman and man. Rather, their performances, publications and graffitties challenge the idea of gender binaries as they expose lingering racial and gender imaginaries that connect with state power and NGO solidarity. Their performances, however, remain isolated from the networks of decolonization that indigenous movements have established and run the risk of turning into a shock commodity.*

Gender has been paramount to the process of Decolonization. In Latin America, indigenous intellectuals such as Fausto Reinaga have held forth the idea of gender complementarity as an illustration of the colonial difference, that is, as an element that distinguishes Aymara gender relations from western patriarchy (1981, pp. 89–90). While for Reinaga gender complementarity is a

reality, for María Eugenia Choque Quispe gender complementarity is an ideal that the colonial experience itself has compromised (1998, p. 12). For many indigenous women, questioning gender paradigms in the process of decolonization has helped to constitute indigenous cultures as dynamic practices that are in need of re-invention rather than offering a return to an idealized past (Cervone 1998, *Mujeres Indígenas de la CONAIE* 1994). Documentary and fiction videos, directed and produced by members of indigenous communities frequently cast women as the guardians of tradition; they enact the transmission of social memory and perform gender complementarity on screen. At the same time, videomakers foster debates over the links between gender and the colonial subalternization of knowledge. For some indigenous videomakers gender complementarity itself has become a metaphor for thinking decolonized relations between indigenous communities and national society (Schiwy 2002).

Social memory and subalternized knowledge is embodied and transmitted in gendered ways but the enactment and representation of such links between knowledge and the female body in the discourse of decolonization has been a central point of debate not only for indigenous movements in Latin America. In postcolonial discussions focused on India and Northern Africa, scholars such as Partha Chatterjee asked whether decolonization mustn't 'include within it a struggle against the false essentialism of home/world, spiritual/material, feminine/masculine propagated by nationalist ideology' (1990, p. 252). While gender concepts are clearly crucial to decolonization, the heterosexual model through which complementarity is thought affirms Andean duality and hides those subjectivities and forms of desire that would challenge binary thinking itself. Indeed, as the literary critic Michael Horswell argues, the Andean gender binary is itself a modern/colonial construct (2003).

Decolonization and gender also intersect in feminist criticism of the geopolitics of knowledge. The Chilean cultural critics Nelly Richard (1996) and Kemy Oyarzún (1992) have frowned on Latin American and feminist scholars studying Latin America for essentializing the concepts of man and woman in Latin America, thus issuing a critique of the geopolitics of knowledge that resonates with Chandra Mohanty's well known arguments about the making of the theoretical subject of feminism (1988). As Richard and Oyarzún call for a deconstruction of gender categories, they themselves, however, rely on a problematic notion of heterogeneity that fails to interrogate how gender and colonial legacies congeal in the process of theorizing in Latin America across different social classes, ethnicities, and technologies of knowledge. The Bolivian performance activists Julia Paredes and Maria Galindo who have worked with urban Aymara women, in turn, have countered the dense interrelations of colonial legacies and heterosexual normativity through graffiti, street performance, and audiovisual media.

All of these approaches to decolonization share a need to address the intersection of gender relations and colonial subalternization. Posing the question of gender allows to discern added complexities of the constitutive elements of the colonality of power. Asking how modern/colonial constructs of gender are perpetuated and contested also helps to better understand the ways decolonization pushes against the building blocks of colonality and where, at times inadvertently, decolonization recreates these.

### **Coloniality and the question of subjectivity**

Despite the meshing together of anticolonial discourse with gender imaginaries the construction and relevance of gender to the colonality of power has been difficult to accommodate. Approaches to thinking the power of colonality in the modern world as well as in the seemingly re-born world of global social movements, commodified multiculturalism, and deterritorialized capitalism are interdisciplinary but they still follow lines of inquiry traced out by the kind of research questions asked. The question of gender is usually set aside, not however the construction of subjectivity. The concept of colonality is three-dimensional; it encompasses the study of economical and political relations in their constitutive role for the process of globalization and emphasizes the qualitative difference these relations have ushered in since the conquest of the Americas, differences that mark the present global world-system inaugurated in 1492 from prior economic relations and imperial desires (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, Mignolo 2000, p. 37). No less foundational are the epistemic relations that have given way to a hegemonic order of knowledge which for many continues to form the way globalization is thought. A shorthand for this order of knowledge has been the concept of Eurocentrism, again inaugurated with the chronicles and reports issued about the Spanish imperial experience in the fifteenth and sixteenth century (Quijano 2000, p. 53, Mignolo 2000). The study of epistemic relations of power also comprises research on epistemologies that were subalternized in the process of colonization and its aftermath. In the colonial past as well as in the present, the focus here lies on how these epistemic traditions have been negotiated and might intersect in novel and more democratic ways, creating a border thinking (e.g., Mignolo 2000, Escobar forthcoming). Thinking about epistemology and about the construction of subjectivity has also involved reflecting on the technologies of representation, de-centering literacy as the technology of the intellect (Mignolo 1995, Schiwy 2003). For many involved in thinking colonality a crucial step has been to think from subalternized perspectives that may be enunciated through multiple media and bodily enactments.

The construction of subjectivity is the third dimension of the colonality of power; it has been thought as a naturalization of colonial relations articulated around the idea of race. For Quijano, the principle of race

has proven to be the most effective and long-lasting instrument of universal social domination, since the much older principle — gender or intersexual domination — was encroached upon by the inferior/superior racial classifications. So the conquered and dominated peoples were situated in a natural position of inferiority and, as a result, their phenotypic traits as well as their cultural features were considered inferior. In this way, race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power.

(2000, p. 535)

When gender has entered into reflections on the colonality of power and processes of decolonization it has been as an afterthought, for instance when Mignolo draws attention to the blindness of so-called white feminism to the colonality of power (Mignolo 2000, pp. 124–26, 314–15). Or, more recently, gender has been taken as a short-hand for 'woman' leading some to ask about the participation of women in decolonization efforts (Escobar forthcoming, chapter five). How gender imaginaries themselves have entered colonial constructs and their aftermath, however, has not received the same attention. Instead, the invention of race — through discourses and practices — has been privileged as a marker of the colonality of power, precisely as a part of what distinguishes this globalization (1492 to the present) from other forms of imperial rule and expansion.

Certainly, racial thinking has been transformed since the sixteenth century, moving from a focus on purity of blood and religious difference, to biological racism, to the multicultural acknowledgement of different ethnicities structured in relation to the market and parallel to the remobilizing of religious and ethnic differences (Mignolo 2000, pp. 27–33). The idea of race has been inscribed and enacted through social practices and performances exercised since the colonial period. It has evolved from the representation of otherness and debates over the humanity of the people the conquerors and clerics encountered in the early chronicles to more contemporary literary, photographic and audiovisual texts that recreate racial otherness and 'colonial looking relations' (Kaplan 1997). Certainly the meanings and parameters attributed to race have also been constructed in intellectual and academic treatises that at once explain and produce our understanding of the world. The construction of racial subjectivity has served as a bodily metaphor for ordering economic, political as well as epistemic relations, while at the same time creating lived exclusions and abuses as well as forms of organized and quotidian

resistance and subversion. Yet, constructs of masculinity and femininity, relations between women and men as well as those who do not fit smoothly into these binary categories have been crucial to all of these dimensions. As Anne McClintock put it in her analysis of British colonialism, 'race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other' (1995, p. 5, emphasis in the original). She adds that 'imperialism cannot be fully understood without a theory of gender power. Gender power was not the superficial patina of empire, an ephemeral gloss over the more decisive mechanics of class or race. Rather, gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise' (pp. 6–7).

Obviously, gender does not refer only to women. It is a construct that regards the ideas we hold about masculinity and femininity, about appropriate roles and about power relations. Gender is a historical and social category that is continuously enacted albeit under the constraints of existing norms and imaginaries that differ across 'geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose' (Butler 2004, p. 10). When debates about gender abstract from the colonial making of social relations (among women, among ethnicities and classes) they risk perpetuating colonial relations. But if gender is no more primary than race and ethnicity, then surely the construction of race cannot be seen to supplant the construction of gender with the onset of global coloniality. Rather, both concepts interact, coalescing into gender specific forms of oppression and meshing longstanding imaginaries in order to justify hierarchies of subjectivity, economical and political as well as epistemic orders associated with these subjectivities. When gender analyses abstract from racial paradigms they tend to recreate geopolitical power relations inaugurated with the colonization of the Americas. When discussions of the coloniality of power abstract from gender, they risk re-inscribing foundational elements of the coloniality power where gender binaries and gender imaginaries have been naturalized.

The colonial imaginary has employed gender as a metaphor and means of subalternization, a metaphor that resulted not only in the representation of territories as female virgin lands that the conquerors penetrated with the sword in hand. The gendering of colonial imaginaries has operated as a means of rendering European masculinity through Othering. That is, European and Caucasian men have thought themselves in opposition to colonized (or postcolonial) men who have been represented as effeminate or as part of an irrational nature where nature itself is also bound up with tropes of femininity (Shohat 1991, pp. 53–5). The emasculation of indigenous men in Latin America has prefigured and paralleled that of other colonized peoples, enacted and inscribed through rape, both real and in the imaginary of colonial texts,

and later in indigenista literature and film. The force of this tool of war has relied not only on the harm inflicted on women it also enacts the inability of colonized men to protect 'their women'. Rape, the founding act and trope of *mestizaje* re-enforces patriarchal relations where women are reduced to objects and their abuse comes to signify damage to male honor. It thus inscribes a heterosexual order and may lead to an urgent need to affirm male power in the process of decolonization.

Early modernity itself was a time when Europe sought to fix a four-fold and more dynamic notion of gender and sexuality into the binary categories of man and woman. George Mariscal argues that 'virtually all forms of subjectivity in this period depended on different degrees and kinds of 'maleness' rather than on the historically more recent male/female binomial' (1991, p. 27). Not only gender — sociohistorically constructed and enacted ideas and roles but sex itself was seen as dynamic, subject to change according to levels of body heat and humidity (Jones and Stallybrass 1991, p. 84). Chronicles telling of encounters with indigenous peoples betray the renaissance anxiety about gender indeterminacy as the conquerors saw themselves battling monsters and virile Amazons (Mott 1992, Montrose 1991). Similarly, precolonial Andean cultures seem to have held the idea of a third gender, a central mediating force that was subalternized with the growing emphasis on gender duality during the colonial period (Horswell 2003). Today, medical practices police the sexual morphology of newborns, at times without the consent of parents, in order to assure an anatomical correspondence between bodies and the idea of a sexual binary, a practice to which the intersex movement in the US is drawing increasing attention (Anne Fausto-Sterling 2000, Butler 2004, pp. 7–16).

Decolonization under current conditions of multicultural capitalism no longer necessarily involves working with binaries of colonizer and colonized or with countering the dominant tropes and logic of colonial power with oppositional categories. Rather, in the context of commodified multiculturalism and revamped imperial discourses on the presumed coexistence of medieval and postmodern culture, decolonization challenges received notions of identity, temporal unevenness as well as knowledge and forms of representation. Decolonization transforms and indianizes established codes and creates novel forms of translation/transculturation (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003, Schiwy 2003). Yet, this does not mean that decolonization can fully disregard the tropes that have categorized the colonized. The emphasis on gender in the projects of decolonization hence comes as no surprise. The way gender concepts are engaged shows different angles and depths of transformation. The remainder of this article will thus not dwell further on the different ways colonial discourse has enacted racial and gender constructs but look at three different efforts to challenge colonialism's aftermath.



### **Feminism, the geopolitics of knowledge, and the problem of heterogeneity**

Nelly Richard and Kemy Oyarzún have been among the most outspoken feminist critics of the geopolitics of knowledge in Latin America. While Oyarzún approaches the question of power and subalternity in the production of knowledge between North and South America from the perspective of feminist literary criticism, Nelly Richard has elaborated her arguments engaging both feminist and poststructuralist theory in her readings of vanguard anti-dictatorship theater and installations by the *Escena Avanzada*. Resonating with Chandra Mohanty's critique of First World white feminism (1998), Richard challenged Latin American studies (the study of Latin America by those located in other places) stating that

también dentro del feminismo opera este ideologema del cuerpo (realidad concreta, vivencia práctica) que soporta la fantasía de una América Latina animada por la energía salvadora del compromiso social y de la lucha comunitaria, cuyo valor popular y testimonial es juzgado políticamente superior a cualquier elaboración teórico-discursiva.

(1996, p. 738)

the ideology of the body (a concrete reality and lived practice) is also at work within the feminism that supports the fantasy of a Latin America animated by the salvational energy of social commitment and communal struggle, the value of which is considered testimonial and close to the people and judged as politically superior to any kind of theoretical-discursive elaboration.

(1996, p. 739, my translation)

For Richard colonial legacies are crucial and express themselves at an international level in the geopolitics of knowledge where Northern academics disdain the theory produced in the South in favor of cultural manifestations to be theorized.<sup>1</sup> Her criticism is certainly warranted (although Richard herself has perhaps been the most widely read and translated feminist critic working in Chile). Richard defends the process of theorizing, however, as a process that cannot abstract from particular lived experiences without repeating the gesture of Eurocentrism. She thus emphasizes the importance of place. Richard invokes the geopolitics of knowledge and their colonial becoming in order to argue against the subalternization of Latin American theorists. At the same time she opposes the easy essentialism and anti-theoretical approach, which she sees as underlying much of Latin America's own feminist critique. For many Latin American feminists, says Richard,

las condiciones materiales de explotación, miseria y opresión de las que se vale el patriarcado para redoblar su eficacia en tramar la desigualdad en América Latina nos exigiría . . . más acción que discurso, más compromiso político que sospecha filosófica, más denuncia testimonial que arabescos desconstructivos.

(1996, p. 735)

the material conditions of exploitation, misery and oppression which patriarchy deploys in order to double its efficiency in laying out inequality in Latin America demands from us ... more activism than discourse, more political commitment than philosophical suspicion, more testimonial denunciation than arabesque deconstruction.

(1996, p. 735, my translation)

For Richard, this political-action oriented approach expresses an unreflected essentialism that ends up affirming the categories of femininity and masculinity instead of questioning their historical making. Feminism thus cements the discourses and imaginaries that have naturalized gender concepts and equipped them with unequal meanings. Against this position, Richard sustains that feminist labor must involve the deconstruction of notions of gender, again an argument that resonates with that of Partha Chatterjee quoted earlier.

Richard's emphasis on the importance of place in the process of theorizing targets a geopolitical structure that places theories from the South and in languages other than English, French, and German at a disadvantage. Place is important because it informs the kind of theorizing we do. Thus, for Richard, the notion of heterogeneity is vital, both in terms of the multiplicity of feminist activists in Latin America as well as with regard to the social heterogeneity of Latin American women. According to Richard, Latin America is marked by 'una pluralidad disímil de voces y estratos de identidad que derivan de espacios y tiempos irregulares, de memorias y tradiciones híbridas' (p. 743)/'a dissimilar plurality of voices and layers of identity that derive from irregular spaces and temporalities, from memories and hybrid traditions' (p. 743, my translation). The heterogeneity of place is precisely what allows theoretical production to destabilize the dominant construction of knowledge as objective and disembodied. Quoting Kemy Oyarzún, Richard thus suggest that

sólo reinscribiendo lo femenino en un contexto de lecturas suficientemente múltiples e interactivas, es posible dar cuenta de la heterogeneidad de posiciones culturales que asumen los signos de identidad en América Latina donde 'cohabitan diosas y dioses precolombinos, vírgenes y brujas, oralidad, escritura y otras grafías; voces indígenas, mestizas y europeas; retazos de máquinas sociales, rituales, semif feudales o burguesas; pero



también dioses del consumismo, voces de la ciudad y de la calle, fragmentos de cultura libresca.

(p. 743)

only reinscribing the feminine in a context of readings that is sufficiently multiple and interactive is it possible to understand the heterogeneity of cultural positions that the signs of identity assume in Latin America. Here 'precolumbian goddesses and gods coexists with virgins and witches; orality with writing and other graphic systems; indigenous with mestizo and European peoples; remnants of ritual, semifudal and bourgeois social machines; but also the gods of consumerism with the voices of the city and the streets and fragments of book culture.

(p. 743)

As Richard list the differences that illustrate heterogeneity, however, she does not interrogate the legacies of colonial power relations in shaping this heterogeneity. The internal conflicts fracturing heterogeneity in Latin America are glossed over as Richard fails to distinguish between the multicultural, the hybrid, and the heterogeneous. In other words, multicultural diversity is not deconstructed in terms of its own colonial history, in terms of its embedded power differences, incompatible and contradictory arguments issued by those thinking from different perspectives (feminist or otherwise) within the heterogeneous make-up of Latin America. Neither does Richard question the colonial construction of value regarding different technologies of the intellect, such as those of orality print media, audiovisual technology, performance, and other complex forms of transmitting knowledge through media means other than literacy.

Technologies themselves have been subalternized in the process of colonization as they have become associated with racial and gendered bodies.<sup>2</sup> Storytelling and the embodied transmission of social memory has been associated not only with indigenous cultures but more precisely with indigenous women; weaving, an Andean technology of knowledge, has also come to be largely equated with femininity. The pen and the movie-camera, in turn, have symbolized and produced phallic power.

Kemy Oyarzún's text from which Richard quotes does understand heterogeneity as a product of colonial history. Referencing Antonio Cornejo Polar, Oyarzún arrives at the conclusion that cultural production reveals heterogeneity in terms of 'concepciones del mundo conflictivas, contradictorias' (1992, p. 35)/ conflicting and contradictory conceptions of the world (p. 35, my translation); cultural production for that reason is often more polyphone than theoretical criticism. Nevertheless, by linking her vindication of the subversive potential of literature written by women with Bajtin, Oyarzún avoids exploring these conflicts, leveling them through recourse to

dialogue, which presumes the possibility of communication in an ideal democratic setting where power relations are relatively absent and subjects interact on the basis of an a priori common ground.<sup>3</sup> When heterogeneity is converted into hybridity and dialogics there is no need to distinguish between the critique and negotiation of power in different voices such as those of Laura Esquivel and Rigoberta Menchú, two examples that Oyarzún herself mentions.

A critique of essentialism must include a critique of colonial legacies. If we refrain from interrogating the colonality of power not only at a geopolitical level but also in the context of Latin America itself, we limit our understanding of the geopolitical relations that constitute heterogeneity. Latin American heterogeneity is reduced to multiculturalism, emptied of its contradictions and incommensurabilities as well as its potentials to think modernity otherwise. The body remains coded in terms of sex and race instead of leading us to questioning the ways gender and racial constructs go hand in hand.

By emphasizing that theory is largely considered to take place in the media and contexts that colonialism itself has privileged, that is in academic spaces and in the technology of the alphabet, Richard also defines what counts as thinking and as sustainable knowledge. Although she affirms the need to 'elaborar formas locales de producción teórica' para frenar el 'nomadismo postmodernista' (p. 739)/'elaborate local forms of theoretical production' in order to brake 'postmodern nomadism' (p. 739, my translation), the opportunity for questioning where and how thinking might take place otherwise is lost, reduced to a critique of the folkloric curiosity exhibited by theorists (and tourists) from the North. The potential of this other thinking, the possibility of reflecting from other angles on what it could mean to deconstruct naturalized identities and power relations framed by these identities demands an approach that engages with subalternized discourses without reducing them to colorful objects of study or consumption. For Richard, however, deconstruction is limited to those forms of academic writing and artistic expression that resist their own commodification. The line between commodity, cultural object of study, and the creation of meaning and knowledge needs to be negotiated differently by those seeking to democratize decolonization.

*Mujeres Creando* is a group of radical Bolivian lesbians and performance activists that brought together urban Aymara women and *Mestizas*.<sup>4</sup> One of the most accomplished street performances or *acciones callejeras* by *Mujeres Creando*, was a critique of feminist NGOs. The performance took place in El Alto, the mostly Aymara city on the highland rim above La Paz and was then edited into a video, put up for sale, and televised on the cable channel P.A.T. The video begins with a fictitious testimony of a young feminist working in an NGO whose salary now enables her to employ a maid, followed by footage of the *acción callejera* itself. In this performance young blond women with their faces painted united-nations-blue play with the globe, an inflated balloon that ends up lifeless and cast aside. They metaphorically drink the blood of the poor as

the video cuts to a close-up of miniature figurines representing Andean women perched on the open palm of a hand. The camera follows their fall into the dirt where they join coins lying in a pool of blood (red wine). Audience participation in the performance is exemplary as young children scramble to pick up the money while women bend to recover the figurines.

The video argues that the funds offered by NGOs exacerbate class differences among women and the exploitation of women by women, strengthening the middle class and its reliance on domestic service, itself a colonial relation that the market has only cosmetically transformed. At the same time global power relations are seen as representing patronizing and exploitative relations that prolong those formed through colonialism. The piece allows for an optimistic reading of Andean solidarity as the women of El Alto recover the figurines so carelessly cast to the ground by the UN blondes but also calls attention to a heterogeneity based on colonial legacies that demands questioning and transforming these legacies. The documentary also foregrounds the differences among women by questioning international NGO solidarity. This is a critique of the geopolitics of knowledge, where because of ignorance, prejudice or for personal gain, economic and intellectual concepts of the North are imported without worrying too much about whether these models actually serve to solve the problems in the South. Although this performance might be seen to complement Richard and Oyarzún's critique of the geopolitics of knowledge it enacts not only a critique of global power relations but also of internal colonialism where racism fractures the concept of gender. This performance is only one of a series of other *acciones callejeras* that target the racism and class differences among women in Bolivia (e.g. KETAL), criticize the racist patriarchy of the Bolivian state (e.g. Prólogo), while also enacting lesbian desire (e.g. Dos mujeres besandose en el Prado) and thus questioning heteronormativity.<sup>5</sup>

The videos by *Mujeres Creando* echo the famous critique of white feminism that Domitila Barrios de Chungara voiced in the First International Feminist Congress in Mexico City 1975 (1991, pp. 216–27) as well as the testimonies of Chilean women collected by Jo Fisher (1993, pp. 17–44, 177–200). Yet the videos go not only beyond Richard and Oyarzún's critique of the geopolitics of knowledge but also beyond Barrios de Chungara's dismissal of questioning sexuality. *Mujeres Creando* destabilize the Andean paradigm of duality. This duality also underwrites the process of decolonization by indigenous movement organizations.

## Indigenous video – decolonization and the body

Indigenous movements in Latin America have been engaged in a long process of anti-colonial resistance that has gained renewed momentum and has

continued to change face and forms since the 1960s. Today, decolonization involves political struggle, working with NGOs and UN level organizations, and rethinking concepts of human, cultural, and intellectual property rights. Indigenous movement organizations have also made use of audiovisual technology, communicating diverse indigenous and peasant populations and thereby creating new spaces for intercultural debate and exchange of ideas.<sup>6</sup> One fundamental aspect of this work has been the effort to decolonize the soul, that is, to counter the effects of ethnic self-denigration that the pressure to assimilate has exacerbated. What role and importance indigenous culture can play in bettering the economic situation of indigenous populations here has been just as important as figuring out what resources indigenous ethics and epistemologies hold for thinking modernity otherwise.

Indigenous filmmakers organized in CAIB (Coordinadora Audiovisual Indígena y Originaria de Bolivia/Bolivian Association of Indigenous Communicators) and collaborating with a center for training in cinematography, CEFREC (Centro de Formación y Realización Cinematográfica) in Bolivia have maintained some of the most prolific and varied video production in the continent. As these indigenous communicators represent the problems and issues their communities face their documentaries and fiction shorts highlight the way indigenous traditions have been transmitted in embodied ways. Storytelling, weaving, even clothing, are not exclusively but more frequently associated with women than with men. Indeed, several of the fiction shorts explicitly frame the problem of the colonization of the soul in a gendered way: women become the guardians of tradition, their death or suffering redeeming those middle aged men, who have come to doubt the traditional stories and belief systems in favor of more secular and rational perspectives that coincide with a long standing colonial discourse that disqualifies indigenous belief systems as superstitions.<sup>7</sup>

*Qati Qati*, a complex thirty-five minute fiction short, signed responsible by Reynaldo Yujra and produced by CAIB and CEFREC, is perhaps the most telling example.<sup>8</sup> It places the relation between gender, epistemology, and economic practice into the center of the frame. In this film, the male protagonist is accused by his wife and by a community elder of having lost respect, not only for the traditional tale of the woman who is converted into a flying head (the story of the *q'ati q'ati*) but also for the spirits of mountains and lakes, manifested in the surrounding landscape, the 'pathways of memory' as Thomas Abercrombie would call it (1998). The video ends with the mysterious death of the protagonist's wife Valentina (Ofelia Condori), herself converted into a *q'ati q'ati* and the protagonist Fulo (Pedro Gutiérrez) declaring that it might have been better to believe.

*Qati Qati* constructs a male cinematic gaze that never quite comes into its own. At the level of narrative, the topic is the redemption of man through woman's death. By implication, Fulo's initial lack of belief is characteristic of a

world order marked by robbery and selfishness, rather than by reciprocity, community solidarity, and traditional forms of administering justice. Reciprocity and community solidarity are enacted on screen by female actors, just as the practice of story-telling itself. Aymara policing and justice, in turn, are embodied by men, keeping with a traditional gendered division of labor but not fully undermining the predominant embodiment of culture by women on screen. At the same time, the camera seeks to maintain a neutral perspective, avoiding point of view shots, in order to embody the eyes of a female and male indigenous viewership. But the video, like so many other indigenous fiction pieces, creates an identification with the male protagonist. The seemingly neutral camera gaze is then indeed rendered male, a perspective that acquires force through the emotions it evokes: as Fulo laughs at his wife's superstitions and at the flying head he sees in his dreams, humor locates the children and the spectators on his side. Nevertheless, the video proposes the female body and mind as the principal site for the reinvention of an indigenous ethics, thus not affirming a masculine order or oedipal allegory. Unlike the anticolonial cinema of Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukamau group, indigenous videomakers do not frame a confrontation between colonizer and colonized and racial discrimination is not the primary topic of their productions.

Encouraged by the context of community screenings and the presence of audiovisual (indigenous) facilitators organized in the Network, the viewers debate the survival and relevance of alternative ethics and social order across different indigenous cultures. These debates re-evaluate not only a colonized epistemology but also one associated with femininity. The power of the colonization of the soul goes hand in hand with patriarchal designs, where those seeking masculinity are seen as rejecting a colonized order identified with women.

Parallel to the epistemic argument, the video frames multiple instances of a gendered division of labor. Fulo braids the ropes for constructing a shelter; Valentina trades potatoes in the market place; she also takes care of the children and small animals. Fulo, in turn cuts wood and guards their potato field against a robber. The argument of the film ultimately ends up endorsing gender complementarity, itself rendered on screen as a successful gendered division of labor between the protagonist and his wife that is based on their equal importance for sustaining their nuclear family and by extension, the social relations within the *ayllu* itself. The video claims — against the western patriarchal order — that Aymara gender relations are based on complementarity and this gender complementarity sustains both an outside to western epistemology and the vestiges of an alternative economic order and ethics. The claim not only recalls Fausto Reinaga's assertions in the late sixties but has also been prevalent in contemporary Aymara politics, from the enactment of gender duality by the populist and media savvy Palenquismo (Archondo 1991,

p. 139) to one of Bolivia's current most vociferous political leaders, Felipe Quispe (1999, p. 15).

This notion of complementarity is crucial to decolonization because it links an epistemic and economic regime with gendered subjectivity. It provides simultaneously the pattern for three types of relations. First, relations between different indigenous traditions; second, relations between diverse indigenous knowledge traditions and western epistemology; and third, for an alternative idea of economy that combines a critique of the unchecked profit principle while vindicating market relations.

Film, however, is not only a form of representation. Social relations are enacted in front of the camera and filmmaking itself is a social practice. On screen *Qati Qati* highlights the market place as dominated by women and by forms of exchange based on barter. At the level of production, the videomakers insist that the videos are collective productions that entail complicated notions of property rights. Thus, not all of the videos produced by CEFREC/CAIB are sold in the free market place. Sometimes buyers will be screened (as to their intended use of the video) and prompted to enter into relations of reciprocity that go beyond the purchase of the video and the exchange of money for a product. On the one hand, although employing a vastly different film aesthetic, the social practice of videomaking transforms economic relations and builds on the legacy of the Latin America's revolutionary anticolonial cinema of the sixties and seventies that sought to transform cinema from a capitalist art form into a revolutionary tool. On the other hand, the attempt to control reception and distribution is no longer linked to the effort to create a socialist revolution. Rather, it invokes a pan-indigenous economic order based on reciprocity, not profit maximization, into which video production and exchange is integrated.<sup>9</sup> Complementarity, derived from idealized gender relations and the principle of duality, thus becomes one model for thinking an alternative modernity.

Gender complementarity, however, is a contested concept in the politics of decolonization. If western 'traditional' gender roles are idealized constructs, shaped since the Renaissance and hardened during the European enlightenment, these constructs do not exactly correspond to gender role ideals in Quechua and Aymara communities. The gendered division of labor and space among Quechuas and Aymaras are not the same as western notions of private (associated with the feminine) and public sphere (associated with masculinity), although the pressures of developmental policies, migration and internal colonialism are increasingly shaping the gendered divisions of labor in indigenous communities as well (Rivera Cusicanqui 1996). Even where traditional indigenous labor divisions are still dominant, the roles of men and women are, however, not interchangeable. Corresponding to a complex ordering of space in terms of female and male attributes Aymara and Quechua



subjectivity is also conceived of as the result of interacting male and female elements as well as other factors.<sup>10</sup>

Allison Spedding suggests that Aymara gender ideals in the Bolivian Yungas region are differentiated by age. For 15–45 year old women they include the ability to work, to bear children, active sexual desire, although to be addressed solely to the legitimate partner — (the same, by the way goes for males), and a penchant for economic calculus. Women are encouraged to travel (to markets), but their status does not depend on the ability to be articulate which, in contrast, is one of the measuring sticks for male status (1997, pp. 337–38).<sup>11</sup> The issue of oral eloquence, however, has become crucial for women political representatives (Cervone *et al.* 1998). Opting to be active in political organization or in videomaking contradicts traditional notions of women's roles and responsibilities in the low and high lands (both according to transculturated indigenous social orders as well as to the patriarchal western ideal) unless this activity is explicitly framed as 'helping' men and of temporary nature.

Unlike in the video *Qati Qati*, the Aymara historian María Eugenia Choque Quispe claims the ideal of complementarity in order to challenge Aymara patriarchy. Choque Quispe invokes the image of the colonizers as those who 'obsessed with gold and silver, raped, kidnapped, and defiled, bringing dishonor to Indian women'. She asserts that 'the imposition of colonial order meant the institutionalization not only of the irrational exploitation of the people and resources of this continent but also of gender relations between indigenous women, indigenous men, and the Spanish, marking them with conflict and violence' (Choque Quispe 1998, p. 12). Gender complementarity has therefore not necessarily meant equality or equal value. Basing herself on Palma Milagro's work, Choque Quispe affirms that

the declining indigenous population and the appearance of castes (in colonial times), transformed the indigenous woman into a commodity whose value hinged on her reproductive abilities as the primary resource for a new identity; for Indian males the possession and control of the Indian woman acquired dramatic significance. The creation of a new prevailing order prompted indigenous thought to make women responsible for their suffering and problems.

(1998, p. 12)

Much has been written about the political representation and contacts with the outside lying in the hands of indigenous men. Women have been seen as, at best, playing an indirect role of exerting influence. Both low and high land cultures have been characterized as patriarchal and even misogynist.<sup>12</sup> In CEFREC/CAIB's indigenous video production, viewers glimpse the problem of violence, such as in *Qulqi Chaliku*, when the avaricious husband physically



threatens his wife, or in the melodrama *Llanthupi Munakuy/Loving Each Other in the Shadows* where the young woman falls for romantic love and tries to escape an arranged marriage only to be killed, though inadvertently, by her father. These are exceptions, however. Issues such as rape, violence against women, or spatial confinement, have not been at the center of most indigenous videos.

Enacting indigenous tradition in gendered ways thus addresses the collusion of racial and gender constructs in the coloniality of power in a creative though not unproblematic way. On one hand, as Madhu Dubey suggested for the postcolonial resolution of nation building, 'decolonizing nationalist discourses summon the metaphorical figure of "woman" to resolve the inescapable contradiction of their project, which is to lay claim to post-Enlightenment European categories of progress and modernity, while reviving precolonial traditions to safeguard the nation's cultural difference from the West (Dubey 1998, p. 2). To be more specific, these 'post-Enlightenment Categories of progress and modernity' here entail the risk of a male dominance that would guard the reinvention of indigenous cultures from a transformation of gender relations and concepts of duality.

The ideology of complementarity and the gendered division of labor create mutual dependency between men and women but this does not imply a lack of hierarchy and processes of subordination. Rather, hierarchies operate in terms of gender and ethnicity where women considered 'misti' or 'mestiza' are above men considered 'indio' and indigenous women are at the lowest rung (De la Cadena 1992, p. 186). In Bolivia, Rivera Cusicanqui suggests that the peculiar articulation of ethnicity, class and gender in Bolivian society at large has lead to a "cadena de estratificación postcolonial" muy compleja ... privilegiando a los sectores masculinos y occidentalizados en las capas con mayores ingresos, mayor calificación y educación formal, y relegando a las mujeres y a los/as migrantes indígenas a las ocupaciones más rutinarias, peor pagadas y con menor prestigio y reconocimiento social' (1996, pp. 51–52)/a complex chain of postcolonial stratification...that privileges westernized masculine sectors with greater economic income and formal education while relegating women and indigenous migrants to the less demanding and worst paid occupations that hold the least amount of prestige and social acknowledgement (1996, pp. 51–2, my translation). As De la Cadena puts it, 'si el proyecto colonizador supuso la femeneización de los pueblos que llamaron indígenas, el entrapamiento del proyecto patriarcal contemporáneo es la indianización de las mujeres' (1997, p. 149)/ 'if the colonizing project supposed the feminization of the peoples they called 'indigenous', the entrapment of the patriarchal project is the indianization of women' (1997, p. 149, my translation). De la Cadena as well as Rivera Cusicanqui address here two crucial aspects of the way coloniality is intertwined with gender: the

‘feminization of indigenous peoples’ and ‘the indianization’ of indigenous women.

The videomakers working with CAIB and CEFREC are acting precisely against the devalorization of indigeneity that is bound to the hierarchies of gender and ethnicity that de la Cadena analyzed. Yet, casting women as the guardians of indigenous traditions and as a resource for thinking an alternative modernity, runs the risk of leaving the gender constructs underlying the coloniality of power unchallenged and reaffirming male dominance as those in charge of elaborating from the raw material of feminized culture.

When gender complementarity serves as an ideal for imagining decolonized epistemic relations with the West the colonial subalternization of knowledge, perspectives, genealogies and technologies of the intellect gives way to a fruitful coexistence where all traditions shed mutual light on each other. But even here, diversity does not simply dissolve itself in multicultural coexistence. Rather like gender relations epistemic relations require a process of de-subalternization. Although indigenous discourse has created debates around gender roles and hierarchies, the relation between colonial subalternization and gender stereotypes itself is still conceived in terms of a gender binary. Homosexuality and third gender remain tabu. Colonial history, nevertheless, is also bound up with creating the well-known duality that anthropologists and indigenous communities have come to see as paradigmatic of Andean cosmovision.

### Decolonizing the gender binary

Based on a detailed analysis of different kinds of colonial texts (written, drawn, woven and orally transmitted), Michael Horswell has argued that Andean duality is indeed based on the notion of a third space, that is, on the ritual enactment of third gender. Duality is negotiated by a liminal zone that corresponds to a third gender which itself was subalternized with colonial discourse. Colonialism itself entailed the creation of the idea of only two genders (2003). While Horswell seeks to avoid the imposition of contemporary categories of identity, such as homosexuality, on the past, his work points to a significant transformation in the understanding of gender and colonialism.

In the last fifteen years, *Mujeres Creando* has been paramount in questioning not only the colonial legacies underlying feminist geopolitics of knowledge and the patriarchal discourses meshed with racism but also its normative heterosexism. Like indigenous videomakers, *Mujeres Creando* create knowledge and debates through technologies of knowledge that do not primarily rely on literacy. In their performances and publications, the group enacts homosexuality without creating the figure of the homosexual as an exclusive identity.

Rather, the variety of desires and identifications becomes a cornerstone of their critique of the intricate construct of power, gender and racial subjectivity. While indigenous movement approaches to decolonization debate gender roles and the subalternization of epistemic regimes by association with femininity, *Mujeres Creando* go a step further, undoing the binary of normative heterosexuality, not only in their famous graffities that have covered the walls of La Paz.

The performance *Prólogo* lead by María Galindo, linked virility, state power, and the Bolivian tabu of discussing sexuality by contrasting flaccid penises being painted in different colors with the erect obelisk on La Paz's main artery. The audiovisual edition of this *acción callejera* obliges its viewers to maintain their gaze on phallic power and its desacralization through a long sequence with little cross-cutting among the close-ups. The performance attests to its power to disturb by including footage of enraged audience responses and the performers' arrest by the police. At the same time, this video enacts a critique of the geopolitics of knowledge and of gender concepts. The shots combine through the on-screen narrative of a lower class urban woman who does not fit easily into the Andean categories of subjectivity. The narrator/commentator of the events fails to correspond to the concepts of man and woman as she becomes a public commentator and is neither *de vestido* (wearing a western dress or costume) nor *de pollera* (the outfit donned by urban migrants that has created the identity of the chola). Her image is reflected back through the video's use of extreme angles, split and tilted frames. The video thus enhances the destabilizing effects of the performance, unsettling the conventions of looking and thinking.

By destabilizing Andean duality *Mujeres Creando* criticizes not only essentialist feminism and bourgeois morality but also the discourses of indigenous movements who deploy gender duality in their efforts to decolonize without opening up possibilities for interrogating the joint history of colonialism and gender. Similar to Oyarzún and Richard, *Mujeres Creando* helps to understand gender not as an ontology but as a socio-cultural construct. In contrast with the Chilean critics, *Mujeres Creando*, call attention to the colonial history of this construct. *Mujeres Creando*, thus enact a reinterpretation of gender concepts that does not emerge from a mere inversion of signs. Emphasizing the experience of a multicultural society where racism and class contradiction continue to coalesce with gender stereotypes they dessentialize the notion of gender. They create a border space that helps to think transformation as a process that requires changing all the rules instead of becoming integrated into a multicultural diversity. Yet, where Richard places her bet with neo-vanguardism and where indigenous videomakers subvert capitalist market relations, *Mujeres Creando* use an urban punk aesthetic that runs the risk of becoming another object of urban consumption, as their

televised screening of the performances produce a shock effect but not necessarily a sustained reflection on the aesthetics and contents of the films, or even on the political oppression that the camera captivates, as Carlos Meza commented in his role as director of the cable channel P.A.T. that aired the videos by *Mujeres Creando* (2000, p. 20).

Despite the pitfalls of the approaches analyzed, *Mujeres Creando*, like the indigenous videomakers, contribute theoretical insights that require conceptualizing the construction of gender as deeply embedded in the coloniality of power. At the same time, they call attention to the binary thinking that has grounded the colonial project itself.

## Notes

- 1 Richard emphasizes that 'el Norte tiende a reservar el privilegio de la teoría a la academia metropolitana mientras la periferia latinoamericana descrita y analizada por esa teoría es vista como un simple campo de práctica habitado por quienes viven la experiencia mientras el latinoamericanismo del centro elabora su debida conceptualización' (1996, pp. 737–8)/'the North tends to reserve the privilege of academic theorizing for its metropolitan self. Meanwhile, the Latin American periphery theoretically described and analyzed is seen as a mere field of practice, inhabited by those living the experience while the Latinamericanism of the center elaborates its conceptualization' (pp. 737–8, my translation).
- 2 Frequently literacy is understood as the culmination of a process of intellectual and civilizational development where the voice is transformed into systems of representation that approximate the spoken word. Critics such as Jack Goody and Walter Ong have asserted that intellectual ability develops in correspondence to the technology of representation, permitting ever more complex thought. This view has been shown to be not only ethnocentric but also plain wrong. Rather, as Brian Street, Mignolo, Jacques Derrida, and others have shown, the notion of orality is flawed in multiple ways. Any system of communication implies oral forms as well as other systems of representation (mimetic and abstract) (Street 1984). The subalternization of alternative semiotic systems is itself an incomplete product of the colonial experience (Mignolo 1995, Salomon 2004).
- 3 This position remains influential for feminists such as Seyla Benhabib or Iris Young who are inspired by Habermasian philosophy of communication that is elaborated from the theory of speech acts rather than from the ethnomethodological approach to discourse analysis with insists that communication itself is always already embedded and constitutive of social relations, including those of power and inequality.
- 4 Monasterios (2006) offers a collection of essays on the work of *Mujeres Creando*.

- 5 The videotaped versions of these *acciones callejeras* are collected on two videos: *Prólogo* and *Acciones*. The individual titles are mine since the video segments on the video *Acciones* themselves are not titled.
- 6 The use of audiovisual technology by indigenous communities and movement organizations has become pervasive in almost all of Latin America. In collaboration with independent filmmakers indigenous videomakers and communicators script, film and edit documentaries and fiction shorts and distribute these through autonomous networks among diverse indigenous communities and at International indigenous film and video festivals. The argument presented here is based on research conducted primarily between 1999 and 2001 in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Colombia. I thank in particular the members of CAIB and CEFREC in Bolivia for sharing their ideas, videos, and experiences with me. See also Himpele 2004, Wortham 2004, Turner 2002, and Schiwy 2003.
- 7 Cf. *Qati Qati/Whispers of Death*, Bolivia 1998; *Qulqi Chaliku/The Silver Vest*, Bolivia 1998; *El Oro Maldito/Cursed Gold*, Bolivia 1999; *Nuestra Palabra/Our Word. The History of San Francisco de Moxos*, Bolivia 1999, arguably also *El Espiritu de la Selva/Forest Spirit*, Bolivia 1998. Many indigenous-made documentaries from other regions in Latin America follow this tendency (Schiwy 2002, especially chapter two).
- 8 Fiction videos such as *Qati Qati* are distributed together with other indigenous fiction and documentary productions through the Bolivian Indigenous Network that connects over 400 villages in the Andean-Amazonian region (CEFREC 2001). The audience for these videos are primarily indigenous communities from Latin America as well as Native American and First Nation audiences from the US and Canada at international indigenous film and video festivals.
- 9 Relations with the multicultural market for indigenous video are thus under construction. Instead of easily integrating into themselves into the sale of diversity, market relations are challenged, and at least in part, rethought as to a possible balance between reciprocity and the free market (Schiwy 2003).
- 10 There is a vast amount of anthropological research on gender and Andean duality. Two foundational texts are Isbell (1976) and Harris (1978).
- 11 At the same time, the gendered division of labor is very strict, and in general women are seen as more able to assume male tasks (working the land) than men could assume female tasks (preparing food, washing clothes) because of the difference in value attributed to each. Also, women are able to find paid male labor, while men cannot find paid female labor — although they are able to take in that of female members of the extended family (Spedding 1997).
- 12 Rivera (1997) as well as Ciales Burgos, *Mujer* for the Aymara context, de la Cadena 'Mujeres' and 'Matrimonio' for Quechua communities in Peru. Lehm and Equipo Ciddebeni (1996) on the Moxos. Jesús Avirama of the

Columbian indigenous organization CRIC stated that ‘the emergence of foundations subject to the rhythm and whims of international fashion – focusing on the environment, women’s issues, or development, for example – is troubling’ (Avirama & Márquez 1995, p. 99.)

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