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Latin American Gender Studies in the Twenty-First Century

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In her much cited 1972 poem, ‘Meditación en el umbral’, Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos captures vividly and unforgettably the sense of potentiality and frustration that might be said to define the early days of second generation women’s rights and cultural work: the threshold exists, she can imagine crossing it, but cannot yet see what is on the other side:

Debe de haber otro modo que no se llame Safo
Ni Mesalina ni María Egipcíaca
Ni Magdalena ni Clemencia Isaura.
Otro modo de ser humano y libre
Otro modo de ser.¹

There must be another way that is not named Sappho
Nor Mesalina nor María Egipcíaca
Nor Magdalena nor Clemencia Isaura.
Another way to be human and free.
Another way to be.

For Castellanos, and for many other activists of her/my generation, that struggle was punctuated by still-potent names like Tlatelolco, the Sorbonne, and Kent State.² It was the generation of authoritarian regimes in the southern cone of Latin America, of the tremendous upswelling of women-headed social movements: las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, the Colectivo de la Media Luna in El Salvador, the Flora Tristán Institute in Peru. Hers was the struggle to put women’s rights on national and international agendas: to raise consciousness about issues relative to wage work, domestic labor, motherhood, the body,

reproduction, race, identity, sexualities, violence. Hers was the effort to promote recognition of women's creativity, and women's claim to the world of the mind.

The literary/academic side of this struggle was on the first level a labour of rescue (to identify authors and reissue works by women, gays, African-Latin-Americans) and of evaluation (to integrate these 'marked' categories into the largely heterosexual, male, dominant cultural understandings of national and international literary projects). At the same time, Latin American and Latin Americanist scholars began to explore the many varieties of feminist theorization: 'French', 'American', socialist, maternalist, essentialist, 'global', local, international. Concomitantly in Latin America in the late twentieth century there was an explosive growth of presses, galleries, exhibitions, performances; of grassroots activism, position papers and theoretical writings, creative work of all sorts by women writers and artists loosely agglomerated as the so-called 1980s 'boom'. 'It is exhilarating', says Joanna O'Connell in an optimistic moment, 'to recognize the dimensions of the changes that have occurred in that short time: despite often extreme conditions, women's ideas, voices, and leadership are transforming the social and political landscape of Latin America' (220).³ These exchanges were further instantiated in the creation of gender studies programmes in many countries throughout the hemisphere, and the sharing of information and resources through NGOs and increasingly complex websites and action networks. The result is that, today, an online search for materials related to Latin American gender studies limited to the domain 'edu' gives the curious researcher access to many millions of sites.

And then, of course, as we all know, came what was on the other side of that particular threshold. The political realm was marked by institutionalization with the return of democracy and the establishment of ministry-level women's affairs appointments. The intense activity of the 1960s–1980s was followed by a certain complacency as an already empowered centre began to reproduce itself, as movement politics fractured into lobbying factions, and parts of it were coopted. The history of activism culminated in the 1995 Beijing conference and seemed to lose focus after that historic event. In the academic realm, weakly established feminist projects began to erode. Peruvian Maruja Barrig summarizes this recent history succinctly:

Beginning in 1993, feminists in Latin America and the Caribbean worked tirelessly to bring together scattered groups of women across the region and to create spaces where women could debate and articulate their dreams prior to the 1995 Beijing

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Global Conference on Women. Those efforts produced the national documents of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and led to the parallel sessions that took place alongside the official gathering of the United Nations in Beijing. [...] In the years since the burst of jubilation that was Beijing, the feminist movement in Latin America has splintered into fragments, and other hands appear to have picked up the pieces. As several studies of regional feminism in the post-Beijing era suggest, not only has feminist militancy redefined itself in ways that opened the floodgates for diverse and sometimes irreconcilable strategies, but also the linguistic codes – those countersigns that we activists used to identify ourselves – have been picked up by officialdom and endowed with new meanings, *almost with the consent* of feminists.⁴

Recent history, then, moves quickly from militancy (including armed militancy) in the 1970s, through the new social movements and the literary boom of the 1980s, to the fragmentation of the 1990s. Then came the backlash.

Recently, a sobering re-evaluation has turned to the much-discussed, supposed domination of women writers in the Hispanic literary scene during the last decades. Only in the last few years have scholars begun to look at the actual numbers and question whether the presence of women writers during and since the so-called 1980s boom is as overwhelming and real as we have been imagining, or something far more nominal. Scholars like Christine Henseler, Jill Robbins, and Laura Freixas have been conducting serious, sociologically-based studies of the publishing industry and the media coverage of literary writers, and have learned that the perceived feminization of the literary world is much exaggerated. In Spain, the fifth largest publishing industry in the world⁵ and centre for the publication of much Latin American fiction, the number of books by women writers remains stable at approximately 20% of total published titles. Furthermore, despite the touted visibility of those few women writers who have garnered significant media attention, Henseler finds that in almost every respect ‘the publishing panorama that women writers faced in the 1990s displayed characteristics similar to those of the late nineteenth century and first three decades of the twentieth century’.⁶

The woman writer, Freixas and Henseler argue, is still seen as a novelty, and, while she can be perceived as newsworthy in the popular press, particularly if she is young and attractive, she is seldom taken seriously as an important writer or thinker by the more elite publications. As Freixas has shown in her exhaustive review of quotes from Spanish media, at the end of the twentieth century ‘femenino’ still meant ‘inferior’.⁷ Thus, it is not surprising that the most successful women writers strongly prefer identification in gender-neutral terms, and firmly

reject categorization as ‘women writers’ because, they find, such labels stigmatize their work. Along parallel lines, even those fields of literary and cultural inquiry that are most deeply indebted to feminist analysis now frequently shy away from citing their foundational sources for fear of marginalization.⁸ The case of the *testimonio* is a particularly evident one: identified with underclass political activism and women testimonialists, this was one of the hottest genres for analysis in the 1980s and early 1990s, but seems entirely obsolete now. In a few years, people like Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios became celebrities, their works made ubiquitous in academic courses across many fields, and in quick succession they were canonized, absorbed into the mainstream, decried, had the potency of their message diluted, and are now almost ignored.

Taking into account the metropolitan context reveals an additional, and largely unexplored axis in the relation between feminization and women’s writing. In Europe and in the U.S., feminized literature and Latin America tend to go hand-in-hand as marginalized categories (this, at the same time as, and not unrelated to, the phenomenon of the lingering appeal of Che Guevara, Emiliano Zapata, and Subcomandante Marcos, who in handsome silk screen prints retain their smoldering and virile sexual power). These days, as García Canclini notes, the choice of which books will be published and circulated in specific countries is decided, not by the country, but by international editors operating in Europe or the U.S.⁹ Thus, Jill Robbins’s question is highly relevant: ‘Which Latin American texts do Spaniards choose as potential best-sellers in Spain?’ Her analysis shows that metropolitans do not choose women’s writing, but, significantly, ‘they choose those [texts] that reflect Spain’s imaginary construction of Latin America as a feminized, indigenized, exoticized, revolutionary trope’.¹⁰ Books that are marketed for transnational sales and translation, that make international bestseller lists, frequently play to these stereotypes. Even more critically, these are the books that have the most access to the various national markets as well. Openly feminist editors like Esther Tusquets were forced into early retirement when their presses were sold to international conglomerates¹¹; feminism, and more broadly, gender and sexuality studies, tend to be all but ignored in literary exchanges, as a complicating variable that somehow seems to be uncomfortably, and indeed almost self-consciously, displaced outside the boundaries of ongoing discussions.

Irenne García says, furthermore: ‘unlike the critics from the “first world”, Latin American women have not created schools, currents, or traditions [...] Photocopies of photocopies pass from hand to hand

among the scholars avid to read each other, to debate each other, to study each other [...] Tied to all that, Latin American criticism lacks something essential: legitimacy – not just institutional, but also social legitimacy'.¹² Chilean scholar Raquel Olea adds: 'Feminism comes from "no-where" into spaces where its discursivity does not yet have a history, where it does not yet have the capacity even to negotiate or enter into alliances'.¹³

Unfortunately, moreover, metropolitan theoretical discourse only partially and imperfectly maps onto the Latin American situation. The selective representation of reality in metropolitan discourse may depend upon discriminatory projects as its very basis. In an acute critique of Slavoj Žižek, for example, Catherine Walsh points out the patterns of patronization in his thinking and argues that 'the cultural logic of global capitalism comes to serve as a modern day form of colonization that obfuscates and at the same time maintains the colonial difference through the discursive rhetoric of multiculturalism'.¹⁴ Oscar Guardiola Rivera adds a recognition of 'the constitutive role of gender in producing colonial spatial differentiation and actual globalized epistemic differentiation'.¹⁵ In a more responsible body of inquiry, these unequal global exchanges of theoretical capital would be ameliorated by analyses that recognize the limitations and shortcomings of metropolitan thought, not only taking account of the fundamental challenges of local cultural effects, but also by amending shortsighted projects so as more fully to engage transnational thinking – and specifically a transnational body of thought that sees how gender construction inextricably engages colonial and globalized geopolitics of knowledge.

Clearly, from the perspective of thirty years later, the record of the late twentieth-century activism with respect to the gay, lesbian, and feminist social and literary movements is a mixed one. The outsider of the 1970s has become incorporated in the 1990s without a sustained intellectual grounding. The challenge posed in the 1970s and 1980s – of creating new orders of representation that would reshape intellectual discussion such that an awareness of gendered implications becomes part and parcel of every discussion of the text, the nation, history, the author – has largely evaporated, ignored in favour of a continuing, uncomfortable, tokenism. Gender studies still seems to come from nowhere, and even with internet exchanges of pdfs partly replacing the old photocopies, the possibilities of engaged dialogue remain severely limited. As Jean Franco writes: 'For many on the left, feminism is still viewed as if the "woman question" were somehow separate from the big macho topics of globalization, the

financialization of the world, pauperization and the environment, when in fact it is crucially involved in these issues'.¹⁶

Given all these obstacles, the question that exercises us, then, for the rest of this paper, is: how are gendered perspectives incorporated into the discussions of unmarked categories in the most recent major reference works and theoretical texts?

LATIN AMERICA REINSCRIBED

The new benchmark Latin American literary histories from the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century capture the shift from activism to nervousness about presumed achievements in opening up the critical field. Often, even as they celebrate a new inclusiveness, they implicitly reflect upon their own discomfort with their continuing practice of a merely token representation of the old, marked categories, one that does not demand a fundamental, across-the-board rethinking of the masculinist presuppositions that continue to dominate the bulk of academic discourse. Three specific cases will serve as examples for our purposes here.

The end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries saw the publication of competing monumental enterprises headed by Mario Valdés (Oxford) and Roberto González Echevarría (Cambridge). Both of these comprehensive literary histories make room for an expanded understanding of the field, with chapters looking at Amerindian, U.S. Latino, Brazilian, and Afro-Hispanic literary traditions, along with the other formerly excluded categories marked by gender: women and gay men. Likewise, many current anthologies of an inclusive and theoretical bent, represented for our purposes by the forthcoming Duke University Press volume *Coloniality at Large* have similarly ambitious claims to a greater range in representation for formerly marked groups, and, indeed, make claims to the projects' novelty on these grounds. The Cambridge and Oxford literary histories belong fundamentally to the same mid-late 1990s era,¹⁷ as work began on them and invitations went out to collaborators at roughly the same time, though the first saw print in 1996 and the latter not until 2004 (five years after its originally projected publication date, with substantial revisions and updating along the way). Work began on *Coloniality at Large* in 2003, and it appeared in 2008. The three volumes, then, serve as a snapshot of the state of the field of the decade starting in the mid-1990s.

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In some sense, these are very non-Latin American projects, in a manner adumbrated by Sylvia Molloy, who has in several forums discussed the different quality of diversity talk in the U.S./Europe and Latin America, to the detriment of the latter. For example, she finds that her use of the personal 'I' in a paper on queering Latin American literature, identifies her in U.S. academic circles as a member of a recognized and generally respected intellectual community, whereas in the Latin American context it is 'seen as a self-identifying gesture, but one devoid of group representativeness and institutional backing; it is a gesture of dissent within a monovocalizing cultural tradition not eager to think through its diversity, sexual or otherwise'.¹⁸

Keeping in mind critiques like those of García, Olea, Walsh, and Molloy, allows us to readily appreciate the dilemma faced by the editors of these volumes, and it is indeed a damnably difficult one: always skirting the threats of patronizing on the metropolitan side, parochialism on the Latin American. By and large, the reader is asked to pick through the volumes, looking for the unusual, happy instance of progressive, ample thinking that enables a fuller understanding of Latin American cultural realities, one that satisfies both the metropolitan and the various Latin American perspectives.

The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature, edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo Walker, has come under criticism along just these lines of pandering to metropolitan tastes. The 'General Preface' argues for the importance of colonial Latin American studies partly by citing 'international symposia devoted solely to colonial literature, as well as sessions within established, periodical meetings, such as the yearly conventions of the Modern Language Association of America'.¹⁹ Stephen Greenblatt cites this passage in an article on changes in contemporary modes of literary history and notes the curious turn by which the MLA is used to confer academic legitimacy on a Latin American enterprise. He argues that, in such appeals to metropolitan attention, 'what we are witnessing is the pragmatic, strategic appropriation of the national model of literary history [...] in order to confer authority on an emergent group'.²⁰ In the metropolitan context, then, the MLA and the Cambridge University Press to some degree define and empower 'Latin America' as a valid cultural unit of analysis, akin to a western nation, with a long and rich literary history. Furthermore, the same measure is used to distinguish the Latin American claims on metropolitan attention from the less worthy claims of the third world. González Echevarría and Pupo Walker say it directly;

comparing Latin American to Third World literature would lead to 'gross distortion', they write: 'desire for solidarity with the Third World is a significant element of recent Latin American literature perhaps even as a movement, but it does not make of Latin American literature a Third-World literature'.²¹ Interestingly, in this exchange, Stephen Greenblatt, a metropolitan critic, is ascribing to the *Cambridge History* editors the kind of anxiety about their 'emergent group' status that the authors of the preface would be quick to deny as a third-world symptom. The preface does, however, clearly indicate the intended audience for their project: metropolitan-based and biased students of Latin American literature for whom inclusion in the MLA is a significant marker of achievement.

The Cambridge History is divided into three volumes along traditional literary historical lines, separating Spanish America from Portuguese America, and subdividing Spanish America chronologically between two volumes: I: 'Discovery to Modernism'; II: 'The Twentieth Century'; III: 'Brazilian literature'. Each volume has seventeen to eighteen chapters, authored mostly by very distinguished scholars, a few of whom have more than one contribution to the project. Volume III also includes extensive general bibliographies for all three volumes. In their 'General Preface', the editors highlight their concern for addressing historically marginalized categories: 'this is the first history of Latin American literature to provide detailed coverage of the colonial period, the works of women writers, and the literature written in Spanish by Chicano and other Hispanic authors in the various regions of North America. Similarly, this is the first history of Latin American literature to link meaningfully the works of Afro-Hispanic and Afro-American authors'.²²

Yet, for all the boldness of their statement about inclusiveness, from the perspective of a diversity- and gender-conscious scholar, the context surrounding it in the co-authored 'General Preface', and in González Echevarría's 'Introduction to Volume II', leaves a great deal to be desired. The preface makes no reference to specific Afro-Hispanic or indigenous writers, and only to a single woman writer – Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz – who is referenced three times: once in a list of colonial era writers, and twice as the subject of a book by Mexican Nobel-prize-winning poet Octavio Paz. Two other women's names appear in the preface. Asunción Lavrin's name comes up as a contributor to Volume I; and Alicia de Colombí-Monguió is cited as the author of an important book on the Peruvian Petrarchan tradition. At the same time, important

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mid-twentieth century male writers like Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Alejo Carpentier, and Gabriel García Márquez receive multiple mentions.

In his 'Introduction', González Echevarría again makes multiple references to Paz, Carpentier, and García Márquez, but Afro-Hispanism and 'indigenist' or 'indigenista' writing (that is, literature by non-indigenous supporters or promoters of indigenous cultures) are given only one sentence each, in the context of their importance as inspiration for such dominant culture writers as Carpentier and Mario Vargas Llosa.²³ He does not include any reference in these general comments to authors from the U.S.-Spanish language tradition, and outside of citing the names of female chapter contributors to the volume, the only mention of women writers appears in a single, vague, isolated paragraph, here cited in full:

The work of women writers has been a focus of attention in the past few years. Earlier writers like Teresa de la Parra and Rosario Castellanos have been the object of numerous studies, and current ones like Elena Poniatowska, Luisa Valenzuela, and Isabel Allende have received considerable critical acclaim. An effort to rewrite the history of Latin American literature to include women writers unjustly neglected previously has met with some success. This *History* has made a deliberate effort in that direction.²⁴

Valdés and Valdés cite a figure of 93.7% of total pages dedicated to writing by men and 6.3% to women writers in Spanish literary histories through 1975.²⁵ While I did not tabulate actual pages of coverage, *The Cambridge History*, by my rough and dirty count, has at most a 10% representation of women's names in its index for the twentieth-century Spanish American and Brazilian volumes,²⁶ and far sparser representation of women in the volume covering literature before the twentieth century – suggesting little improvement over the mid-twentieth century model, and certainly far short of the conservative 20% that would be the minimum representation one would expect, given the pessimistic picture revealed by recent publishing studies.

The organization of the Brazilian volume is almost entirely chronological, with each contributor taking responsibility for a specific literary genre in a specific time period (e.g. 'poetry from the 1830s to the 1880s'). The Spanish American contemporary volume has more topical chapters, and while they include Vera Kutzinski's overview of Afro-Hispanic literature, there is no chapter focusing on indigenous writing (there is one on indigenist literature). As promised, references to women writers occur at least marginally in the individual chapters, but there is

no chapter focusing specifically on questions of gender and sexuality, and almost none that structurally incorporate the insights derived from feminist theoretical approaches.

'Feminism' has index entries in both of the contemporary volumes. In the Brazilian literature volume there are two references. One makes a passing allusion to feminism in a long list of 'dominant critical trends'²⁷; the other, longer reference occurs in K. David Jackson's account of the Brazilian short story, where, with a capaciousness unusual to this volume, he dedicates four paragraphs to women writers: one each for Clarice Lispector, Nélide Piñon, and Edla van Steen, as well as a miscellaneous paragraph that refers to five other women (less than two pages total).²⁸ The twentieth-century Spanish American volume has four references: the obligatory mention in a list of critical trends²⁹ and three more substantial comments: (1) two sentences on Dolores Prida, including mention of the importance of the United States women's movement to her theatre,³⁰ and (2) a nearly two-page discussion of important Chicana writers.³¹ The most important and integrated discussion reflecting an awareness of the contributions to theory of gender analysis comes in Sandra Cypess' overview of Spanish American theatre, one of the few places in this project where works by women and men of diverse races and sexualities are woven together, balancing and enhancing the whole – a model for the way in which a gender-conscious scholar can catalyze a rethinking of the entire field.

The Oxford *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History* project has a very different structure.³² This is a monumental project on any terms, involving thirty coordinators in ten subdivisions and over two hundred separate contributions, two-thirds of which were originally written in languages other than English (French, Portuguese, Spanish). The project was undertaken after extensive research into the genre of literary historiography and a series of multinational meetings with collaborators over a period of eight years beginning in 1993. The overt intent of this project is not only to provide a comprehensive literary panorama of the continent, but more radically, to rethink literary history as a format and Latin America as a conceptual space. In the 'series overview' Valdés and Linda Hutcheon speak passionately about the project that absorbed them for so many years, a personal and intellectual commitment that responded to what they call 'a moral imperative'.³³

The words 'literary' and 'history' are widely separated in the title and subtitle of the project. Especially important is the modifier 'comparative' in the subtitle, a clear indication of the transnational and transdisciplinary

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awareness that animates the work overall. Grounding this understanding of literary history is the recognition that people live, work, and write in more than one language community at the same time (that Linda Hutcheon and Mario Valdés, two of the three animating intellects for the volume, have Canadian, rather than U.S. affiliations is surely telling, and the third, Djelal Kadir, specifically mentions the uniqueness of someone with his name involved in a project of this sort).³⁴ Indeed, the first paragraph of Mario Valdés's general introduction signals that a comparatist perspective is crucial for this rethinking, so as to appropriately recognize and give weight to all three main traditions of American culture: European, Amerindian, and African. He follows this observation with another comparatist reminder, one that crosses national boundaries, to note that in studying the African diaspora, for instance, the responsible scholar needs to take into account the fact that only 5% of enslaved Africans went to the U.S., whereas 40% were sent to Brazil and 40% to the Caribbean.³⁵ By design, this project is, thus, comparative in a broad sense: in Valdés's definition: a 'collaborative interdisciplinary study of the production and reception of literature in specific social and cultural contexts. The nation need no longer be the model'.³⁶

The contributions to this project are gathered in three volumes, divided along axes that do not reflect traditional period/genre chronologies: I: 'Configurations of Literary Culture'; II: 'Institutional Modes and Cultural Modalities'; III: 'Subject to History'. Inspired by Foucault and Braudel, this more flexible structure learns from Foucault the value of a discontinuous history organized around 'multiple dialectic encounters' that will require an active reader to participate in and pursue inquiries.³⁷ Braudel helps remind the editorial team of the importance of paying attention to diverse elements within culture, and of opening the project to the broader social context, including perspectives from disciplines like sociology, economics, and demography that are not traditionally part of literary historical studies. Individual articles range widely: colonial women, contemporary lesbian and gay writers, Mayan theatre, Zapotec poetry, Afro-Latin American fiction, museum culture, the Catholic church, bio-politics. Because the range of topics is so broad, and so suggestively interwoven, nothing stands out as tokenism. Overall, Valdés and his collaborators have created a rich, fascinating sea to dip into, but, as Valdés's call to an active reader in his introduction intimates, this comparative history is not as user-friendly as traditional literary history volumes. While it is full of interesting material and unexpected connections, unlike traditional studies, or even the Cambridge volumes,

it is difficult to imagine using it in the time-honoured service of quickly cribbing for exams.

Coloniality at Large's three editors include a scholar well known for her gender-attentive work, an internationally recognized philosopher, and a young scholar with strong technological affiliations.³⁸ The thirty-two contributors represent a veritable who's who in current Latin American theoretical dialogue. The gender-conscious comparatist coming to this volume from the expansive Valdés literary history will immediately see how the two projects almost too neatly fall into a mid-90s openness on the one hand, and a gradual closing of possibilities symptomatic of this postfeminist moment on the other. Thus, the Cambridge literary history makes an overt gesture toward inclusivity that goes largely unfulfilled, the Valdés project offers a multi-threaded capaciousness, and the Duke book largely seems to propose that gender studies are all well and good in their place, but this volume is where real theorists speak about important topics. Curiously, the contributor list to *Coloniality at Large* includes a subset of prominent thinkers who in earlier decades had been closely identified with spearheading a reevaluation of gender theory in Latin American scholarship, but here seldom inflect their analyses with insights from feminist theory or cite women scholars.

The volume is, of course, united by its focus on colonial and postcolonial theory, and as such is strongly transnational and comparative in its orientation. The roster of theorists referenced in general background discussions, except for Gayatri Spivak, are all prominent men. More than one scholar refers to the 'holy trinity', a set of touchstone figures—Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Spivak—who are cited over and over by almost everyone, and that list is supplemented by Guha, Foucault, Lacan, and Derrida as the presiding theorymeisters from the international canon. On the Latin America side, the most significant citation index is entirely male: Dussel, Cornejo Polar, Rama, O'Gorman, García Canclini, Martín Barbero, Mignolo, Quijano, and Fernández Retamar, implicitly framing the strong subaltern studies emphasis of most of the contributors to this volume. There is, almost too obviously, the obligatory token gender article, here R. Aida Hernández Castillo's 'On Feminisms and Postcolonialisms'. This article, along with an isolated subsection of Arturo Escobar's paper, 'Engendering Modernity/Coloniality', that dedicates six pages to the inadequacy of the dominant (male) theoretical models in addressing questions of feminist epistemology, and five pages on Chilean feminist scholar Nelly Richard in the contribution by Román de la Campa, constitute almost

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the entirety of overt gender analysis in this 900-page manuscript. Scholars with strong feminist credentials but whose work here does not embrace a gendered perspective include Sara Castro Klarén (on Mariátegui), Elzbieta Sklodowska (on Benítez Rojo), Iris Zavala, and Amaryll Chanady.

Only three of the thirty-two chapters, outside of the isolated ‘feminist’ article, fully incorporate a gender perspective as an integral aspect of theoretical analysis—Mary Louise Pratt (who, without focusing on gender per se, beautifully incorporates insights from feminist analysis into her study of imperial perspectives), Silvia Nagi-Zekmi (looking at transculturation in Gómez Peña and Anzaldúa with the help of Judith Butler), and Arturo Arias (whose discussion of the problem of machismo is fully integrated into his exploration of the significance of the Maya movement). This is not unexpected in a high theory volume, but discouraging in the mid-00s. It reminds us once again that despite the 1980s promise that gendered analysis would inflect and enrich our literary and cultural analyses across the board, little has changed in the privileged and more valued realms of theoretical discourse, where the obligation to think more inclusively continues to be met through inclusion of a token article, or ghettoized subsection, perhaps even a throw-away reference to the absolute cruciality of gender theory for all serious study. As of yet, high theory has felt no imperative to rethink the fundamental structures of its discourse, and continues to reproduce itself through a limited bibliography of shared texts that define the discursive field, and define it through an unmarked male perspective.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

If these volumes represent the state of literary historical scholarship at the turn of the twenty-first century, what, to use Castellanos’s term, is the current threshold for gender-conscious scholars? In Latin America, the post-Beijing ideological backlash and movement fragmentation occurred at the same time as postfeminism took hold in the metropolitan centres. Twenty years ago, says Marta Lamas, a prominent Mexican feminist and founder of the influential journal *Debate feminista*, there was little interest in the protests of ‘a few crazy feminists’ (‘unas cuantas locas feministas’) now, she argues, ‘there is a worldwide dispute over controlling women’s ideology’ (‘hay una disputa mundial por controlar la ideología de las mujeres’).³⁹ In an environment where it seems that two steps back are taken for every difficult step forward, activists like Rosario Castellanos,

for good or ill, continue to set the agenda for contemporary thinkers: we still echo her concerns about the body and subjectivity, about the relationships to power, about the way national symbols interact with both popular and high culture. At the same time, *mutatis mutandis*, gender studies scholars and activists, as well as authors concerned with representing gender diversity in their works, are learning to become attentive to a restructuring of priorities with the transnationalization of gender studies in the post-2000 neoliberal, globalized landscape.

As the activists of the 1960s to 1980s age, and as we become the mothers and grandmothers of today's young thinkers, generational factors also come into play in a way recent scholarship is reluctant to engage except as a symptom of backlash. Already a 1996 Mexico City study offers a snapshot of this postfeminist trend: only one third of the people surveyed in a study of 1,700 individuals of diverse educational, age, and class backgrounds had positive feeling towards feminism (largely women, with 16% of the men). The other two thirds of the respondents were divided evenly between those with a negative attitude towards feminists and feminism, and those who were uniformed or indifferent – a 63% negative response. Strikingly, the strongest negative responses came from the most educated (university students) and the richest (upper class) survey subjects.⁴⁰

For women from the second generation, still scarred by the incomplete nature of our long struggles, this repudiation or indifference is confounding, particularly since, continentally, some form of girl power is hot in popular culture. Do we interpret this phenomenon as the consequence of an imperfectly consolidated movement that has lost its purchase? A younger generation's typical rejection of their mothers' ideals? A hostility framed on socio-political grounds, but which is really based on resentment of the older generation's presuming to dictate what is correct? Part of a resistance to theory in general? Or the mothers' discomfort with their sons' and daughters' engagement with the popular forms of the twenty-first century that we see as dispersing their creative and activist energies? To what degree are the local/nationally focused social movements of the 1970s to 1980s out of step with young Latin America's participation in the postmodern globalization of cultures?

Many of these younger scholars and writers are engaged in a transnational field of work, including identity and gender work, that we have been slow to recognize or support. We mothers may fall in line with the fathers, mourning the loss of cultural specificity in recent literary work – certainly, one of the most familiar charges against the MacOndo

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generation of the 1990s was their overinvestment in international popular culture and perceived lack of sufficient engagement with local realities.⁴¹ Yet, to be fair, from the perspective of the next generation, in the area of gender and sexuality studies, in their understanding of their relation to their cultural and identitarian investments, national and regionally-bound models look insufficient. As students of Latin America and Latin American authors themselves become increasingly transnational, their commitments and networks likewise transcend continental borders. Young, transnational writers with strong gender awareness in their work would include novelists as varied as Cristina Civalé (who comfortably inhabits cyberspace) and many authors who live transnationally and write biculturally in the U.S., Europe, or Asia as well as Latin America: Lina Meruane (Chile and New York), Mario Bellatín (Mexico and an imaginary Japan), Giannina Braschi (Puerto Rico and the U.S.), Jaime Bayly (Peru and Miami), Karen Tei Yamashita (California and Brazil), Anna Kazumi Stahl (U.S. born of Japanese-German descent, she lives in Argentina and writes in Spanish).⁴² James Green and Florence Babb argue that, increasingly, such writers are the norm rather than, as in earlier eras, the privileged exception: 'We must now be willing to consider the flows of individuals, cultural products, information, technologies, and political movements across borders that are fast altering sexual landscapes in Latin America and beyond'.⁴³

These young authors are turning 'Latin America' into a fact rather than merely a useful hermeneutic fiction for Western scholarship, and inhabit a world far different from the Paris or New York of an earlier generation of writers, people like Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, Severo Sarduy, and Manuel Puig, as well as globetrotting foremothers from Flora Tristán to Luisa Futoransky. Less overtly militant than their activist mothers, their gender consciousness often seems more integral to the shape of their narratives. Working from their multilingual and transnational understandings, they respond indirectly to an earlier generation's questioning of the status of (national) literary studies, and reinvent the task of the writer in an increasingly globalized intellectual world. They use parody and pastiche to show, between the lines, the association among power, knowledge, and gender. As writers and thinkers from this generation rise to greater prominence in the academic world as well as the literary one, we will undoubtedly see new forms of comparative Latin American literary historical scholarship. But, as Castellanos so wisely noted, that is a threshold we cannot imagine until we cross it.

NOTES

- 1 Rosario Castellanos, *Poesía no eres tú: Obra poética 1948–1971* (Mexico: Fondo de cultura económica, 1972), p. 316.
- 2 This is not to ignore the long history of activism in many countries. In Mexico, for instance, more than 700 women gathered in Mérida, Yucatán, in 1916 for what was billed as the ‘First Feminist Conference’; and other national and international conferences were held throughout the 1920s. See Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 28–31 and p. 39.
- 3 Joanna O’Connell, ‘Social Justice’, *Signs* 20:1 (1994), 219–222.
- 4 Maruja Barrig, ‘Latin American Feminism: Gains, Losses and Hard Times’, *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34:5 (2001). Accessed 16/5/2006. <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu:2048/pqdweb?did=71503572&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=8424&RQT=309&VName=PQD>
- 5 Book publishing has become increasingly international; for instance Lumen, Mondadori, Grijalbo, Electa, Debate, Montena and Plaza y Janés are now owned by U.S. publisher Random House, which is a subsidiary of the German-based international giant, Bertelsmann, making this group the second largest Spanish-language publisher in the world. Many decisions about Latin American publishing, thus, run through New York and Spain, and indirectly through Germany. See Jill Robbins, ‘Globalization, Publishing, and the Marketing of “Hispanic” Identities’, *Iberoamericana* 3:9 (2003), 89–101.
- 6 Christine Henseler, *Contemporary Spanish Women’s Narrative and the Publishing Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 3.
- 7 See Henseler, *Contemporary*, p. 2. also Laura Freixas, *Literatura y mujeres* (Barcelona: Destino, 2000), p. 37.
- 8 Amy Kaminsky, ‘Feminist Criticism and Latin American Literary Scholarship’, *Dispositio/n* 49 (2000), 135–153.
- 9 Néstor García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada* (Mexico: Paidós, 1999), p. 152.
- 10 Robbins, ‘Globalization’, p. 99.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 12 ‘a diferencia de las críticas del “primer mundo” las latinoamericanas no han creado escuelas, corrientes o tradiciones [...] Fotocopias de fotocopias pasan de mano en mano entre las estudiosas ávidas de leerse, debatirse, estudiarse [...] Aunado a todo esto, la crítica feminista latinoamericana carece de algo esencial: legitimidad, no solo institucional, sino social, como feminista’; Irenne García, ‘Teoría literaria feminista: el problema de la representación’, *Debate feminista* 5:9 (1994), 113–115, this quotation p. 112.
- 13 Raquel Olea, ‘Feminism: Modern or Postmodern?’, in *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America*, edited by John Beverley, José Oviedo, and Michael Aronna (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 192–200, p. 197.
- 14 Catherine Walsh, ‘The (Re)articulation of Political Subjectivities and Colonial Difference in Ecuador: Reflections on Capitalism and the Geopolitics of Knowledge’, *Nepantla* 3:1 (2002), 61–97, p. 83.
- 15 Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, ‘In State of Grace: Ideology, Capitalism, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge’, *Nepantl* 3:1 (2002), 15–38, p. 29.

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- 16 Jean Franco, 'The Long March of Feminism', *NACLA Report on the Americas* 31:4 (Jan/Feb 1998). Accessed 16/5/2006. <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu:2048/pqdweb?did=25875719&sid=1&Fmt=3&clientId=8424&RQT=309&VName=PQD>
- 17 Beyond their domination of international publishing, there is an obvious reason why these U.S. and British publishers are privileged in this article. The concept of 'Latin America' as a useful rubric has limited currency within the vastly different cultures it references. The term, as is well known, was developed by the French so as to include their own colonial history along with that of the Iberian countries, and to exclude the Anglo cultures. However, except for the rare Canadian scholar, few Latin Americanists would include Quebec in 'Latin American' surveys, which in the best of cases make passing references only to Haiti. Likewise, the volumes that limit 'Latin America' to those territories formerly colonized by Spain and Portugal have mixed records of attention to the majority languages in countries like Paraguay and the United States, where Spanish is not the dominant language.
- 18 Sylvia Molloy, 'Mock Heroics and Personal Markings', *PMLA* 111:5 (1996), 1072–1075, p. 1074.
- 19 *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. xiv.
- 20 Stephen Greenblatt, 'Racial Memory and Literary History', *PMLA* 116:1 (2001), 48–63.
- 21 González Echevarría, *Cambridge History*, p. xvi.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 25 María Elena Valdés and Mario Valdés, 'Rethinking Latin American Literary History', in *Latin America As Its Literature*, edited by Mario Valdés et al. (New York: Council on National Literatures, 1995), pp. 68–85, p. 72.
- 26 Thus in the Brazilian volume, out of 929 names cited in the index, 94 were women.
- 27 González Echevarría, *Cambridge History*, p. 339.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 229–231.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 414.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 554.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 580–582.
- 32 Full disclosure: I am a contributor to this project.
- 33 *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*, edited by Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. xxx.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. xvii.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. xix.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. xx. Here, and elsewhere, Valdés and his collaborators seem to be pointing to a hyperlinked electronic resource as the ideal form for this project rather than the printed book.
- 38 *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos Járegui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

- 39 Marta Lamas, '... que veinte años no es nada', *Debate feminista* 6:12 (1995), ix–xiii, xi.
- 40 Ana Lau, Eli Bartra and Anna Fernández Poncela, *Femenismo en México: ayer y hoy* (Mexico: UAM-Xochimilco, 2000), *passim*.
- 41 A typical MacOndo writer's response would be that the so-called "realities" they are asked to represent are metropolitan wish fulfillments based on 1960s magical realism; see earlier comment on publishing trends. Alberto Fuguet says: 'I never felt that Latin America was the way it was portrayed in the books we had to read'; and fellow MacOndo writer Edmundo Paz-Soldán adds: 'You can call us alienated kids who are sold out on American pop culture, but it's the truth of our times' (in Nicole LaForte, 'New Era Succeeds Years of Solitude', *New York Times* 4 January 2003; accessed 31/10/2005. <http://www.wehaitians.com/new%20era%20succeeds%20years>).
- 42 See Amy Kaminsky, *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) for a suggestive analysis of the 1970s–1980s diaspora of Latin American writers, mostly in Europe and the U.S. Analyses of specifically gay and transgendered diasporas can be found in David William Foster, 'The Homoerotic Diaspora in Latin America', *Latin American Perspectives* 29:2 (2002), 163–189 and in Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, *Transvestism, Masculinity, and Latin American Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).
- 43 James N. Green and Florence E. Babb, 'Introduction' to the special issue: 'Gender, Sexuality, and Same-Sex Desire in Latin America', *Latin American Perspectives* 29:2 (2002), 3–23, p. 18.