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War Cry of Feminism: Reclaiming the Voice and Body of Latinas

Latinas are subject to ever being defined as objects until they answer their war cry with their claws of justice to tear the throat of the illusionary White feminism through solidarity, capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial power that so give named objectivity. The paper shall be divided into two sections. The first section will focus on the reclaiming of the Latina voices through scholars Bárbara Martínez-Cairo and Emanuela Buscemi who challenge the hegemonic feminism with a decolonial feminist lens, Next Gabby Rivera's characters Juliet Palante and Harlowe Brisbane interactions, Cristina Tzintzun who challenges her white father's white "feminist" label, and lastly, scholar Stephanie Berruz challenges the limits and invisibility of Latina Identity in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Section two will deal with reclaiming the feminist body with Luna Merbruja and how they want to not be forced into choosing between sterilization from their hormones and motherhood, Roberto L. Abreu, Kirsten A. Gonzalez, Della V. Mosley, Lex Pulice-Farrow, Alissa Adam, and Francesco Duberli conduct a study of 15 immigrant Latina transgender in Florida in how their intersections of being both Latina trans women with their immigrant, gender, and ethnic status and identity inform their healthcare experience, to Melissa Hyams in how young Latina women negotiate their subjectivity in heteropatriarchal power, and lastly Natalia Souza who show how feminism can be a tool for the political Latina body in violence against women in contemporary Latin American

politics. In order to reclaim what has been stolen feminist Latinas must dismantle the white feminist solidarity that reinforces domination through painting diverse experiences in the same white color through decolonial feminism as seen through out scholars and writers work Bárbara Martínez-Cairo and Emanuela Buscemi's *Latin American decolonial feminisms: theoretical perspectives and challenges*, Cristina Tzintzun, *Colonize This!*, Gabby Rivera's *Juliet Takes a Breath*, and Stephanie Berruz *At the Crossroads: Latina Identity and Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex"* as well as both physical and metaphorical body that creates a liminal space of existence seen through the works of Luna Merbruja's *Resisting Sterilization & Embracing Trans Motherhood*, Roberto L. Abreu, ed al *"They feel empowered to discriminate against las chicas": Latina transgender women's experiences navigating the healthcare system*, to Melissa Hyams *Adolescent Latina Bodyspaces: Making Homegirls, Homebodies and Homeplaces*, and lastly Natalia Souza in *When the Body Speaks (to) the Political: Feminist Activism in Latin America and the Quest for Alternative Democratic Futures*. Feminism especially Western centralized feminism while attempts to break barriers and build bridges of unity; it does need to be questioned when solidarity reinforces the hegemonic power of the capitalize, patriarchal, and White dominance that overlays the true diversity of the world. It must be looked at through a decolonial lens.

Section 1: Voice: The Call

Similarly, scholars have critiqued the limits and flaws of White feminism. Scholars Bárbara Martínez-Cairo and Emanuela Buscemi use a decolonial lens when examining White Feminism and discover that:

“However, over time, European and North American feminism has been identified as hegemonic, as it implies the universality of representation of identities as

well as of women's struggles and revindications. Nevertheless, critiques from marginalized women in the North, as well as women from the Souths of the world, have pointed out its essentialization and othering of women who do not identify with a white, heterosexual, middle-class milieu, as well as its failure to represent women's hardships in different political, social, and cultural contexts" (Martínez-Cairo and Buscemi).

While White feminism has without a doubt open doors and opportunities that otherwise was only ever done in the shadows of history. However, from its "inception" in Europe and North America it was for White women to gain power for themselves to the exclusion to women of color as they weren't even considered aforethought. As stated above women of color in later movements have their experiences painted in an ethnocentric and hegemonic color that is devoid of nuance and diversities which their cultures and worlds have birthed. This is not only dangerous but also arrogant because to say that every person of color especially women of color fit into a monolithic mold or to follow the advice of "to simplify a problem one must simplify its people" which historically never works nor will ever work. Women of color especially Latinas have faced hardship, ethnic cleansing, multiple political upheavals, colonization, etc.. that has made it a great deal harder to gain resources that are at barer essential the scraps of the white, patriarchal, capitalist, world that paint to ignore the unpleasantness of their privilege and their "inheritance" of colonization. This is why one must reclaim their voice through a decolonial lens in order to challenge the "solidarity" of white feminism. Gabby Rivera's character Juliet Palante develops this decolonial lens when she goes through her internship with Harlowe Brisbane.

In *Juliet Takes a Breath* by Gabby Rivera the character Juliet Plante is forced to confront her feelings about her favorite author Harlowe Brisbane after she fabricates Juliet's life to save face when confronted about her book on white solidarity and feminism this is Juliet physically,

mentally, and spiritually taking a decolonizing lens to what just happened (206). When Juliet leaves the convention, she thinks about Harlowe and even tries gaslight herself:

“And Harlowe, I’d left her there without a goodbye. Guilt like hot wax spread through my insides. Her words repeated themselves in my head. *Fought her whole life to make it out of the Bronx alive*. Yeah, the Bronx was tough, but that wasn’t my life. Had I misled Harlowe? Or had she really just used me to make a point?” (Rivera 207)

What Juliet learns and realizes in this breath in the long legacy of white women even “well-intentioned/liberated” overshadow the nuanced life of Latinas and other people of color into a stereotypical portrait that has been reinforced since colonization in this case the Poor, Brown Girl, Liven in the mean streets, dodging bullets. That’s how Latinas are seen, They have to be wild, spicy, loud, uneducated, and poor, in this the white solidarity that asks women of color to join their “white sisters” who benefit from painting them with a dominant color and colonizing their experiences. This is the catalyst for Juliet’s shift into a new consciousness and reclaiming of her own voice when later she confronts Harlowe.

Harlowe and Juliet try to make amends but because Juliet has reclaimed her story, body, experience, and her voice. She no longer just takes what is given she melds everything that she had learned not just from the experience with Harlowe, but all the others, and her own experience to say to Harlowe:

“That’s not enough,” I continued, holding the tree I’d just kicked. “And what sucks is that I know that know you know that. Deep down you also know you get a pass. Maybe not from Maxine and Zaira, but from every white lady in that room. All of them just looked at me all sad. Like as if they were ready to ‘discover’ their own little lesbian Latina from whatever hood and make themselves a savior too.” (Rivera 295)

In this, she backlashes at the narrative that was thrown on her and she is no longer participating in the illusion of white feminist solidarity because Juliet knows that Harlowe will get a pass from other white women because Harlowe lives in a system where she is dominant that she holds the power and she won't truly be held accountable from others. Juliet can't change the whole world and perhaps can never remove the underline bias that was learned in Harlowe. However, that isn't Juliet's job but what she can do is reclaim herself/voice and how she reacts to the world this is similar to how Cristina Tzintzun reclaims herself with her racist father.

Tzintzun looks back at her father later in life with a decolonial lens and finds him wanting with his "liberated" views. She would give voice to her concerns about the type of comments her father would say about Latinas as she tells her father:

"When I would hear these comments, I'd tell my father that he was a racist. That just because he was white and American did not mean that every brown woman wanted him. I'd tell him just because they were poor and Mexican, he thought he was better than they were." (33-34)

In this moment or experience that Tzintzun deals with her father, it shows that she has deconstructed the lessons her father teaches her throughout her life and takes them internally to rebuild her own voice in how she reacts to her father. While she can't control her father and remove everything he knows. But how she reacts with her knowing voice can be empowering to and within herself. No one person can truly change the world only how one interacts with the world they were given. Tzintzun isn't just going against her father at this moment but the colonial narrative that Western Europeans write for Latinas that every Latina wants a white man, that his phenotype, his pigment, doesn't make him better than anyone else. Tzintzun's father isn't the only one who uses his skin for "liberation" as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* links the

(gender) white and black (race) slavery which gives scholar Stephanie Berruz pause to the limitations of the Latina experience within this framework.

Simone de Beauvoir has been a foundry stone in white feminist discourse for a number of years but like many of the previous writings and scholars mentioned above she too must be looked at thoroughly with a decolonial lens that scholar Berruz analyzes Beauvoir's work. When analyzing *The Second Sex* she found that:

“However, any racialized woman who is considered from within this framework is made indeterminate because the categories available presume gender (female) to be white and race (slave) to be black. Working along an enunciation of the black-white binary that ties gender problematically to white-ness and enslavement to blackness renders the possibility of a multidimensional identity like that of Latina imperceptible within the architecture of *The Second Sex* (330).”

They have to break out of the Black-White binary constraint of the Beauvoir because one can't render themselves separate from who they are at best it shows ignorance at worst it shows arrogance. It is in this that Berruz is reclaiming their voice by speaking to the multinational that is the Latina and that they cannot be made into a monolithic mold that separates both race and gender from their experience. Feminist Latinas not only try to reclaim their voice but bodies as well for it is how they move through the world and bears its scars of experience.

Section 2: Body: Liminal Embodiment

The Latina body has a marred historical narrative with colonialism and capitalism that opened a liminal space for the Latina experience of being despite Western European influences that attempts to turn it into a monolithic paradigm. This is the gilding placed upon Luna

Merbruja whose struggling with the liminal world of transitioning and motherhood. When they looked at their own trans community, they found the answers wanting:

With all these conflicting feelings, I decided to seek answers in online forums where transgender women talked to each other about our trans womanhood. I desperately sought out the conversations that dealt with fertility, but what I found only worsened my confusion. Most trans women felt such intense dysphoria surrounding their genitalia that they wanted nothing to do with it. Some even went so far as to state that anyone who wanted to keep their genitals and fertility intact was not a “true transgender woman.” I couldn’t find anything about trans women having children *after* transitioning; most trans women had had their children before transitioning. (44)

Multiple spaces are being applied to Merbruja as we have transness, motherhood, and wanting to reclaim the Latina body. By even looking for the question this creates a liminal space while they might not feel that their community supports this doesn’t deter them from reclaiming their vessel of fertility and motherhood. Later on, they would write an article that “calls out the lies about being told to trans women and how there is a lack of acknowledgment with sterilization to reproductive in the feminist movement” (48). In this way, they used their Latina body to show there is an experience being overlooked and needs to be reclaimed thus opening a liminal world of possibility. Similarly, this is just one way trans-Latinas reclaim their bodies as a study by Roberto L. Abreu et al when looking at the intersectional ways trans-Latinas navigate the health disparities of the healthcare system.

Healthcare is fraught with barriers for the trans Latina body thus they have to create open liminal space to reclaim their physical bodies. When the group interviewed the participants about how they experience healthcare one participant responded “Many people are undocumented.

They're also not going to provide them with medical assistance, and they have to resort to purchasing hormones under the table (49-year-old, first generation, Cuban) (Abreu, Gonzalez and Mosley 184)." In this trans-Latina liminal space, they are forced to reclaim their physical body by creating solutions like getting their hormones for a livable experience that is often denied in the general healthcare system. An underground healthcare system that is created has a long historical narrative particularly for Latinas when healthcare is lacking from both legal and economic obstacles. Healthcare isn't the only place where Latinas must negotiate to gain their bodily needs but also in the home.

Scholar Melissa Hyams conducts interviews with young Latinas from lower-income Los Angeles to discover how they Latinas negotiate their spaces like the home and community which intertwines the autonomy of growing up. What she ultimately discovers through these interviews is that "In parodic performance of "homegirl" identities, through strategic expression of heterosexual desire, and in engagement in domestic "chores" and confinement to domestic space, the young women gain access to and carve out spaces of control, spaces in which they feel safe, trusting, competent, and autonomous (553)." What is seen through Hyams is that while Latinas bodies are socially engaged in the home and are points of pride within them this doesn't mean that they become a model Latina as this is also where they can show resistance within this bodily label. It is both the Latina being controlled and craving a liminal space of their bodied livability in a safe and more autonomous space. The body and home are interlinked with the Latina experience in that it is crucial not only for their physical body but their metaphorical one as well. It is not just the living but also the abused and dead that need to reclaim their bodies in a liminal space.

Natalia Souza, a scholar, looks into how the feminist movement contextualizes violence against women to aid in Latin American struggles. To this extent, they argue that to help reclaim the body is “by taking up an intersectional anti-systemic resistance against capital, feminist struggles in Latin America are able to better re-signify the role of violence against women in this system, rupture the binary logic of victims and perpetrators which organizes many identitarian struggles, and perhaps assume a new stance in representing women’s bodies in the political (96).” Flipping the script brings feminism not just to academics and other gatekeepers of knowledge but to the people to take on the contemporary political struggle that exists in Latin America that endangers and encourages violence against women. In this, the Latina body is no longer structured as binary narrative thus creating a new liminal narrative space.

The voice and body of Latinas are powerful tools of resistance and reclamation that help open new narratives in a liminal space that at the same time decolonize such as from scholars and writers like *Latin American decolonial feminisms: theoretical perspectives and challenges*, *Colonize This!*, *Juliet Takes a Breath*, and *At the Crossroads: Latina Identity and Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex"* and the liminal body such as in the works of *Resisting Sterilization & Embracing Trans Motherhood*, *They Feel Empowered to Discriminate against Las Chicas*: *Latina Transgender Women's Experiences Navigating the Healthcare System*, *Adolescent Latina Bodyspaces: Making Homegirls, Homebodies and Homeplaces*." Blackwell Publishing, *When the Body Speaks (to) the Political: Feminist Activism in Latin America and the Quest for Alternative Democratic Futures*. Utilizing a template in section one with a decolonial lens has shown the experiences and limits of white feminism through other scholarly work by prominent Latina feminists as well as works of literature that highlight the White and Latina experience. In the second section, we utilize the physical body, the metaphorical body, and the abused/dead body.

Each stage creates a liminal space in order to create the bodily space needed for livability even beyond death. Utilizing the voice and body helps us understand why Latina feminists try to reclaim their voice and body; in the end, this opens up a world of possibilities that challenge the monolithic model that has been created from a colonial dominant narrative.

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