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Constructing Solidarity Across Difference in Feminist Encounters

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Abstract: In this article, I discuss how solidarity across difference can be fostered in meetings between social movements. Based on the writings of postcolonial feminists and an analysis of two social-movement encounters that took place in Peru, I develop three aspects of solidarity across difference: the recognition of the intersectionality of struggles, the acknowledgment of “unmapped common ground” as a shared basis for working together, and imagination as a mode for bridging the gap between oneself and the Other. I illustrate my argument with examples from the 5th Diálogos – a meeting between urban feminist, women’s, and anti-mining movements, scholar activists and artists – and the 13th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro to show how the discursive construction of difference interwove with organizational decisions and the hegemonic ordering of difference to open or constrict the spaces in which solidarity across difference could be developed.

Keywords: Solidarity, Postcolonial Theory, Feminism, Social Movements, Peru

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Encountering Difference, Practicing Solidarity

The question of how to foster solidarity across difference has been a central issue for feminists for decades (Grewal/Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003; Vargas 2003). On the one hand, those articulating visions of global sisterhood have argued for an already existing commonality between women that can provide the basis for recognition and solidarity (Morgan 1984). On the other hand, others maintain that creating non-colonizing solidarity across difference is near impossible within contemporary structures of power and privilege (Mohanty 2003). The latter writers hold that only through the slow work of re-arranging subjectivities can solidarity be worked towards (Spivak 2009). How solidarity across difference is constructed in practice, however, is not often systematically scrutinized through empirical work.

Following Juan Ricardo Aparicio and Mario Blaser (2008, 85), I argue that the privileged sites for the analysis of how solidarity across difference is enacted are the encounters between social movements. In this article, I read two feminist social-movement encounters through the lens of postcolonial feminist theory. Postcolonial feminist theory includes the work of Black feminists (Hill Collins 2000), *Women of Color* (Moraga/Anzaldúa 1981), and Third World feminists (Mohanty 2002), among others, and is concerned with understanding, challenging, and transforming dominant power relations that are based on intersectional hierarchies of difference. In Anglo-American contexts, these approaches are sometimes also subsumed under the label “transnational feminism”. In Latin America, however, “transnational feminism” primarily denotes the work of feminists for international organizations and NGOs. I have chosen to use “postcolonial feminism” as an umbrella term for these heterogeneous approaches.

Bringing these approaches into a dialogue, I develop three aspects of solidarity across difference: the recognition of difference as valuable, the acknowledgment of the “unmapped common ground” as a shared basis for working together, and imagination as a mode for bridging the gap between oneself and the Other. Understanding these three aspects as more than individual dispositions, I argue that the latter are collectively created modes of encounter that shape how one meets those seen as different and how one deals with situations

that disrupt one's expectations of how these meetings are supposed to develop. The three aspects of solidarity across difference are embedded in the power relations of the societal context in which one encounters the Other.

The social-movement encounters analyzed took place in Lima, Peru, but were transnational in scope: the 5th Dialogues between Knowledges and Movements (Diálogos entre Saberes y Movimientos, in the following: Diálogos) were a meeting between urban feminist, rural women's, and anti-mining movements, scholar activists, as well as artists, mainly from Peru and Latin America that aimed to forge connections across previously unbridged differences. The 13th Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro (XIII Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe, in the following: EFLAC) was part of a series of feminist regional encounters that have taken place in Latin America since the 1980s and are widely recognized as central in constructing a "self-consciously regional feminist political identity" (Alvarez 2000, 1).

My analysis is based on a long-term research collaboration with the activists organizing the Diálogos. During my four fieldwork stays, which lasted from one to several months, I collected documents; accompanied the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the two encounters; conducted 31 in-depth interviews with the organizers and participants of the two encounters; and discussed my preliminary analysis with the activists involved. In accordance with the wishes of some of the activists, I have anonymized the interviews. While I was involved in all aspects of the organization of the Diálogos and developed my research in co-operation with those organizing the encounter, my role in the EFLAC was more limited. I participated in the open plenary sessions in preparation of the EFLAC and co-facilitated one of its sub-plenaries, but was not privy to all internal debates (for more information, see Leinius, forthcoming). The findings presented here are based on a situational (Clarke 2005) and poststructural discourse (Diaz-Bone 2006) analysis of the two encounters.¹ In my research, I strove to perceive difference not as an empirical phenomenon to be measured and explained, but rather to center difference as an approach to research that is aware of the colonizing bias of research that reifies, categorizes, and hierarchizes difference and seeks to challenge these tendencies. My analysis has been nourished by the conversations and discussions I had with the activists of

1 By mapping all the actors that make up a situation, situational analysis allows the creation of a complex picture of the context in which people engage in interactions and co-produce discourses. Created from a feminist standpoint concerned with the way difference is articulated, it has been used also as a supplementary method for discursive analyses interested in the link between discourse, human interactions, and the material world (Clarke/Friese/Washburn 2015; Marttila 2015). I traced the discursive logics of the two meetings, the way in which participants of the meetings identified with or challenged the latter, and the dynamics at the plenaries of the two meetings concerning the taking of voice and the politics of translation that took place.

the Diálogos and the EFLAC, especially Mar Daza, Gina Vargas, Luna Contreras, Diego Saveedra, Raphael Hoetmer, and Agus Daguerre.

In what follows, I first sketch the contours and context of the two encounters. Second, I explain my methodological and analytical approach. Third, I identify three aspects of solidarity across difference in feminist postcolonial writing, which I trace in the discourses and dynamics before, during, and after the encounters. Fourth, I discuss the continuing influence of the hegemonic ordering of knowledge and power on the possibilities for communication across difference able to consolidate solidary relations. I end with an evaluation of the ambivalences of solidarity across difference.

The Development of the Two Encounters

Embodied Encounters Across Difference: the Diálogos

The Diálogos took place from 21–23 September 2014. This was the fifth social movement encounter organized in a workshop format by the Programa Democracia y Transformación Global (PDTG), an activist collective based in Lima that focuses on popular education as well as supporting and producing knowledge with social movements.² During the three days of the meeting, a total of 60 people participated, with an additional ten facilitators. The 34 Peruvian participants were activists from eco-territorial struggles in the provinces (eleven), representatives of NGOs (four), of LGBTQ-collectives (five), leftist parties (three), art collectives (three), academia (two), and political grassroots initiatives (two). There was one feminist activist, one representative of the student movement, and one Afro-Peruvian activist. 26 participants came from abroad. The 20 participants from Latin America mainly represented eco-territorial struggles or were academic activists. There were five scholar activists from Europe and two from Africa. The PDTG's facilitation team was composed of ten persons, of whom four were from Peru, one from Colombia, one from Bolivia, one from Argentina, and three from Europe (the Netherlands, Spain, and myself from Germany).

The Diálogos were financed by the Spanish NGOs EntrePueblos and ACSUR-Las Segovias as well as the Dutch NGO Broederlijk Delen – three organizations that have their roots in solidarity activism with the global South. The Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) provided funding from its line of support for

² The PDTG was founded in 2002 at the National Major University of San Marcos (Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos), one of Peru's largest public universities, as a post-graduate program within the Faculty of Social Sciences. In 2007, the PDTG decided to leave university in order to be closer to the social movements it worked with, constituting itself as an NGO and publishing house.

international seminars and dialogues between researchers. The network of the Popular University of Social Movements (UPMS 2016), which held a meeting in Lima directly after the Diálogos, sponsored the travel and accommodation costs of their members and provided funding for other participants as well.

The Diálogos took place in a building of the Missionary Society of St. James the Apostle in Barranco, a quiet middle-class neighborhood right at the sea-shore in the southern part of Lima. While the building was chosen for organizational and budgetary reasons, its use as the center of the Missionary Society's activities in Peru influenced the dynamics of the Diálogos. The presence of crosses and other symbols of the Catholic faith impacted upon several of the participants. One of my interview partners, for example, commented that she felt inhibited by the presence of the crosses, as "many times, you cannot talk freely when they take you to a Convent" (interview 21/11/2014).³

On the first day of the Diálogos, the participants were encouraged to reflect on their experiences with social-movement activism, linking their personal history with social-movement history by constructing timelines, first individually and then collectively. On the second day, commonalities and divergences between the timelines were discussed and linked to the context in which the movements interacted. Based on this critical appraisal of the possibilities for articulating dissent, the struggles of social movements and the alternatives they offer were mapped in a collective cartography (Risler/Ares 2014). The meeting culminated on the third day with a debate on how to promote these alternatives.

Most of the work was done in groups, who then presented the results of their work in plenaries. The groups changed depending on the task to be completed, and participants were repeatedly encouraged to reflect on the composition of their groups. Two panels were organized for the plenaries. In one, activists and researchers presented their view on the link between extractivism, patriarchy, and coloniality; in the other, activists discussed the alternatives their movements had put into practice.

Engaging Diversity as Resource: the EFLAC

The EFLAC, attended by about 1400 women – of which 43% were from Peru⁴ – took place from 22–25 November 2014 in a public park in the center of Lima. The

3 In what follows and if not indicated otherwise, quotations were originally in Spanish and have been translated by me.

4 Of the 1466 women registered, 1391 women participated in the encounter. 615 were from Peru, 117 from Mexico, 91 from Nicaragua, 88 from Colombia, and 87 from Bolivia. Some participants (including myself) were women from Europe or North America. 62% of the participants were older than 30; 20% were younger; the rest did not give their age when registering (13 EFLAC 2014c, 40-41).

decision to convene the encounter there was, according to the organizers, “a proposal for ‘taking’ public space and invading it materially and symbolically” (13 EFLAC 2014c, 20). It was also a reaction to the criticism that the venue of the previous EFLAC in Colombia, a four-star hotel, had provoked.

Preparations began in July 2012 with a meeting attended by 40 activists. In 2013, the three most influential Peruvian feminist NGOs – the Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán, the Movimiento Manuela Ramos, and the human-rights organization DEMUS – took charge of the process (13 EFLAC 2014c, 34). Fundraising was difficult, as the funding agencies that had financed previous EFLACs struggled with diminishing resources in the wake of the financial crisis (13 EFLAC 2014c, 21). In the end, financial support was provided by the International Cooperation Working Group on Gender (MESAGEN) in Peru, UN Women, the European Union, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), the United Nations Population Fund, the German Diakonie, and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). Additional funds came from the registration fees of participants, the remaining funds of the previous EFLAC, and crowdfunding. The funds raised were, nonetheless, only about a quarter of the resources available for the previous EFLAC (13 EFLAC 2014c, 22). Stipends were given with a preference to indigenous and peasant organizations from the Peruvian provinces that had participated in one of the three pre-encounters organized in the cities of Cuzco, Huancayo, and Chiclayo. The 36 stipends available covered registration fees, travel costs, accommodation, and food.

During the mornings of the encounter, panel discussions were organized, with up to seven panelists from Peru and Latin America invited. In choosing the panelists, “the diversity of perspectives, identities, and Latin American political proposals” (13 EFLAC 2014c, 43) was taken into account. Panelists were supposed to discuss “Interculturality and Intersectionality” (day one), “Sustainability of Life” (day two), and “Body and Territory” (day three).⁵ After the panel discussions, the audience was divided into sub-plenaries to discuss in smaller groups – in practice, the sub-plenaries were organized on only two of the three days (13 EFLAC 2014c, 43). In the afternoons, self-organized workshops took place, followed by cultural events. When registering, one could apply for the organization of a workshop, providing a title, a list of organizers, a brief summary of the content, and information as to whether the workshop spoke to one of the three topics of the morning plenaries. Altogether, 120 activities were proposed,

5 Each panelist had seven minutes for presenting their reflections on what the topic of the panel meant to them, followed by a round of comments and questions from the audience, a brief round of responses from the panelists and another round for the audience.

of which 63 were accepted – the organizers tried to accommodate all applications by proposing the merging of proposals on the same topic (13 EFLAC 2014c, 64). Most workshops did not, however, subscribe to one of the three themes (13 EFLAC 2014c, 70). The organizers explained this by pointing to the function of the EFLAC as a meeting space for transnational feminist networks and groups, which strive to present their perspectives and proposals irrespective of the overarching themes of the respective EFLAC. On the last day, the general assembly filled the morning slot; in the afternoon, the EFLAC concluded with a march.

Preparing the Ground for Solidarity Across Difference

Concerning the question of how to translate between postcolonial feminist writing and the discourses and dynamics before, during, and after the two encounters, I draw on Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier's (1992) approach to analyzing the "lesbian feminist social movement community". Arguing that the lesbian feminist movement in the US is a community built on heterogeneous local groups, they maintain that political solidarity is based on three aspects: the construction of *boundaries* that distinguish the solidary group from the groups whose domination is challenged, the creation of a shared *political consciousness*, and the formation of *shared practices and strategies* to resist domination (Taylor/Whittier 1992, 107, 110). These aspects align with poststructuralist work on the discursive construction of alliances between different subjects, as developed, for example, in the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). Laclau and Mouffe, however, assume the ubiquity of modernity; the potential existence of social worlds organized according to different logics is not part of their reflections. Poststructuralist writing also tends to introduce a distance between abstract thinking and lived experience. Guided by a poststructuralist perspective on social movements (Leinius/Vey/Hagemann 2017), I use the systematization of Taylor and Whittier as the starting point for my analysis.

The Boundaries of Intersecting Struggles

Postcolonial feminist work generally underlines the restrictive aspects of borders, be they discursive, material, or political (Anzaldúa 1987). Political solidarity, however, "foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together" (Mohanty 2003, 7) – a way to identify who belongs to these communities is indispensable. There is no predefined solidary group, but rather a continuous construction of "mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities"

(Mohanty 2003, 7). Gloria Anzaldúa goes further than Chandra Mohanty in arguing in favor of inclusive identities as a basis for political solidarity: “Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include” (Anzaldúa 2009, 245). Political solidarity, according to her, is based on the embodied capacity to cross multiple borders, on *conocimiento*:

“Conocimiento es otro modo de conectar across colors and other differences to allies also trying to negotiate racial contradictions, survive the stresses and traumas of daily life, and develop a spiritual-imaginal-political vision together.” (Anzaldúa 2002, 571)

Like Mohanty, Anzaldúa foregrounds experiential commonalities and common aims, but unlike Mohanty, does not locate them in relation to a structural position within global capitalism (Roshanravan 2014, 52; Carty/Mohanty 2015, 90pp.). For her, “difference-based alienation becomes shared identity” (Keating 2005, 247). Having experienced the policing of the boundaries of social movements based on exclusive identity claims, she concurs with Audre Lorde, who underlines that “[t]here is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives” (Lorde 1984, 138).

Political solidarity, consequently, is not so much about one common cause, but about recognizing the intersectionality of different struggles *as* common cause. Anzaldúa frames border-crossing activists as *nepantleras*: threshold crossers that refuse exclusive forms of belonging and are involved in various struggles, sometimes having experienced the oppression that is challenged directly, sometimes struggling in solidarity. Lorde has similarly argued that the common ground for coalitional work is the “very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference” (Lorde 1982, 226).

Both encounters started from the acknowledgment that difference is central for struggling together. How difference was perceived, however, shaped how the encounters engaged with it and formed how and where the participants of the encounters were able to articulate difference. The central problem of the Latin American feminist movement identified by the Political Manifesto of the EFLAC, published with a call for participation as an invitation to debate (interview 09/11/2014), was that “diversity has neither been valued nor understood as a concrete possibility for confronting discrimination in all its forms” (13 EFLAC 2014b, 1). Feminists need to “learn to accept and manage the conflicts, the dissent, and the diverging visions” (13 EFLAC 2014b, 3), because difference is interwoven with inequality. Meeting those different from oneself, therefore, inevitably results in conflict. Conflict needs to be turned into dispute, because

“[o]ur energy and capacity for change is sustained in political-cultural dispute, enriching it with the voices of new actors whose presence renews

and deepens democracy as far as our feminisms are being Blackened, indigenized, cholified, transgendered, lesbianized, 'de-normalized'." (13 EFLAC 2014b, 3)

Propelled by the presence and voices of "new actors", dispute enables feminists to sustain their "energy and capacity for change". The actors characterized as "new" to feminism – notwithstanding their decade-long activism in the feminist movements of the continent – are categorized as Black, indigenous, *cholo*⁶, transgender, and lesbian. Latin American feminists are therefore characterized, implicitly, as 'normal': 'white', *mestiza*⁷, cis-gendered, and straight. These feminists also retain the power to define who counts as different. The distinction between the unmarked feminist subject and those cast as 'diverse' also shaped how these groups were expected to participate in the encounter. While all participants had registered as individuals, 'diverse feminists' were seen mainly as representatives of social movements. Stipends to participate in the encounter, for example, were granted to organizations, who could then decide whom to send. The panelists for the morning panels were also chosen "taking into account the diversity of perspectives, identities, and Latin America political proposals" (13 EFLAC 2014c, 43). These categories were challenged during the encounter. The Declaration of the "Lesbians, Bisexuals, Transgender, Sexuality and Gender Dissidents that Participate in the XIII EFLAC", for example, proclaims,

"We want to repeat that our political and sexual identities are a project of everyday emancipation that works side by side with the strategies of feminism, because transgender, bisexual, lesbian, feminist persons are also black, disabled, indigenous, young, sex workers, and *mestizas*." (13 EFLAC 2014a, §8)

The Diálogos also saw difference as a resource for emancipatory politics, but did not see it as a fixed identity category. The urge to categorize was, instead, defined as a main feature of the oppressive system, which "creates borders of identity and dichotomous positions in order to exercise more control over people's life. It hierarchizes us" (Daza et al. 2016, 88). In this context, being able to encounter each other and build bonds is already "revolutionary" (Daza

6 *Cholo/chola* denotes those who have moved to the coastal cities from the Andean highlands. In hegemonic discourse, which has equaled the Peruvian coastal cities to modernity, this means that they had to leave behind their indigenous beliefs and customs. Those characterized as *cholo/chola* continue to be marked as different and their rural Andean roots continue to be of importance for how they are interpellated, but they are believed to be "less provincial" than their Andean counterparts (Greene 2006, 328).

7 *Mestizo/mestiza* are derived from *mestizaje*, a notion that is part of the Latin American modernizing and civilizing project. Asserting "whiteness" as the hegemonic norm, it denotes the political and cultural project of creating a homogenous and unified nation through the "whitening" of Latin American populations through "racial" and cultural mixing (Safa 2005, 307).

et al. 2016, 88). The Diálogos, contrary to other meetings between social movements, were consequently based on the conviction that “one learns from difference and complementarity” (Daza et al. 2016, 99).

When choosing whom to invite to the Diálogos, identity categories presuming difference were nonetheless taken as a starting point. However, the need to identify on the basis of these categories was suspended once the encounter began. In an exercise about the construction of timelines, participants were asked to put forward their own interpretation of their affiliations when choosing the struggle for which they would construct a timeline. The exercise started with the participants’ moving around and, according to the instructions of the facilitator, building groups according to their “native” language, the color of their eyes, and their main struggle, in this order. The groups talked about what their main struggle was and decided on a group name, which resulted in the four groups “Territory and Peoples’ Sovereignty”, “Peasant Urban-Rural Resistance”, “Transversality of Struggles”, and “Eco-Feminists, Killjoys and Transfeminist Diversity”. The groups then presented themselves so that participants could change group if so desired. The exercise itself started with each group member writing down a personal memory that she had lived in relation to the struggle she identified with and sharing it with the group. These memories served as the basis for constructing a timeline for the last 30 years of the struggle.

Throughout the Diálogos, the organizers repeatedly underlined that identifications were shifting, multiple, and transgressing exclusive identity categories, striving to underline the various intersections between experiences and struggles obscured by the divides set up by exclusive notions of difference.

Creating a Shared Political Consciousness Based on the Un-mapped Common Ground

The recognition of the intersectionality of struggles does not, however, displace the centrality of a “politics” of solidarity as context-specific practice that is linked to specific embodied struggles and the “need to tackle multiple and ‘shifting currents of power’” (Sandoval 2000, 218; see Eschle 2004, 70). This entails, as Lorde emphasizes, the need for self-transformation as well as collective transformation:

“I urge each one of us here to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears.” (Lorde 1984, 113)

Only through the recognition of the interdependency between women, she argues, can difference take its place as a “fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic” (Lorde 1984, 111). She continues

that “[o]nly then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening” (Lorde 1984, 111). The recognition of interdependency does not imply the overcoming of difference – which would run counter to Lorde’s understanding of political activism as creative work sparked by difference. Contrary to exclusive solidarity-building, as observable, for example, in nationalist or populist movements, Mohanty underlines that “[s]olidarity is always an achievement, the result of active struggle to construct the universal on the basis of particulars/differences” (Mohanty 2003, 7). As knowledge is always partial, the desire to learn from each other and find out what binds one’s experiences together becomes central. Solidarity across difference, then, is built on the “unmapped common ground” and not on what is already believed to be known. The suspension of recognition, together with the desire to de-center one’s understandings of the world provides the *shared political consciousness* needed.

The Political Manifesto of the EFLAC proposes positing the body as a focal point through which diverse struggles can be linked (13 EFLAC 2014b, 1). The violence that women’s bodies in particular experience “is what unites us; our struggles pass through it and it provides us with bridges”, as one of the organizers of the EFLAC underlined in one of the preparatory open plenaries. The EFLAC accordingly took place under the slogan “For the Liberation of our Bodies” (13 EFLAC 2014b, 1). All women experience this violence differently, the discourse on the EFLAC holds, which results in a diversity of identities and struggles. If engaged with correctly, this diversity can enrich the feminist movement – first, by forcing feminists to reflect on the power relations within and between movements, and second, by provoking conflict that can then be turned into dispute. The ability to critically reflect on power relations and one’s own positionality within them is put forward as the political consciousness needed to strengthen the Latin American feminist movement by turning conflict into dispute. The capacity for reflection became a marker for identifying the legitimate subjects of the encounter: Suggestions for inviting particular well-known activists of, for example, the autonomous and Afro-Latin feminist movement, were rejected because the people in question were characterized as not willing to reflect on their opinions (fieldwork diary, §334). The Diálogos started, like the EFLAC, with a recognition of diversity:

“We all have differences, but we encounter each other in this difference. We start from the knowledge we have, a knowledge situated in territory, but which is at the same time a knowledge that has to be generalized between all.” (PDTG 2014, 28)

However, they drew different conclusions to EFLAC, concluding that the grounds on which alliances can be built is the recognition of the interdependency be-

tween all beings: "It is the relations that constitute us; we are with others, for others, through others; life is in the relations, not in the individuals" (PDTG 2014, 67). This stance was fruitful in linking struggles that, in Peru, usually do not readily intersect, such as, for example, LGBTQ and indigenous struggles, as one of the indigenous activists I interviewed confirmed.

"The issue is to see, not only think 'ah, because she is a lesbian, because she is homosexual', but to see that she is a human being. And a human being needs and deserves a life in dignity. Consequently, this helps very much, for us, in understanding ourselves more. This I have learned in dialogue, the solidarity, the sisterhood; I think this is what the word 'solidarity' means." (interview 21/11/2014)

Recognizing the situatedness of knowledge and the subsequent need to share knowledge in order to gain a broader view provided the shared political consciousness of the Diálogos. The unmapped common ground was visualized by actually mapping social movement struggles and the alternatives they propose onto maps of Peru, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. In addition to these four groups, one group mapped conceptual debates in Latin America. In the presentation of the maps, the group that had mapped the struggles in Peru admitted that there were many places that they had had to leave empty because they did not know what struggles were developed there. They concluded – and in the report on the encounter prepared by the organizers, this statement was marked in bold – "we need more communication, more dialogue or encounters with other organizations" (PDTG 2014, 100).

Imagination as Shared Strategy

For postcolonial feminists, creativity and imagination are indispensable for any practice of building border-crossing solidarity:

"Imagination, a function of the soul, has the capacity to extend us beyond the confines of our skin, situation, and condition so we can choose our responses. It enables us to re-imagine our lives, rewrite the self, and create guiding myths for our time." (Anzaldúa 2009, 248)

According to Gayatri Spivak (2000), imagination is needed because there is a limit to one's knowledge of the Other. Instead of making solidarity impossible, the gap between oneself and the Other foregrounds the ethical move to supplement complete intelligibility through imagination: "Radical alterity – the wholly other – must be thought and must be thought through imagining" (Spivak 2000, 99). Therefore, practices need to be built that can bridge difference without the need for intelligibility. These practices need to be based on education in – as

Spivak calls it – the “uncoercive rearrangement of desires” (Spivak 2004, 526), because there is “a limit, an unknowable alterity, an excess, which elides comparison and exchange but to which equality must extend” (Birla 2010, 97). Solidarity is a “problem of relation rather than a problem of knowledge” (Spivak 2000, 105). In practice, this means striving to supplement the gap between oneself and the Other, but recognizing that this gap can potentially never be bridged (Spivak 2009, 36fn18; Spivak 2000, 111). Consequently, Spivak is wary of social movements’ hasty claims to solidarity with oppressed groups. According to her, the basis for solidarity is the transformation of subjectivities at both sides of the colonial difference into subjects capable of ethically relating to the Other, of perceiving themselves as subjects, and of imagining a different future. This requires a sustained engagement with the Other and a persistent desire to learn. Spivak maintains that this is slow work (Spivak 2009, 35).

In both encounters, the belief in the possibility of change served as a powerful emotion able to supplement the gap with the Other. My interview partners affirmed that the Diálogos and the EFLAC were important because they opened spaces in which alternatives could be visibilized and discussed. The hope this engendered “fills you with, I don’t know, this energy that yes, it must be done” (interview 05/07/2016). The mere fact of getting together and exchanging experiences of struggle mitigated the feeling of being alone. In a context dominated by the common sensation that there is no alternative to the current system (Dinerstein 2015, 186; Issa 2007), exacerbated by a state that represses social movements and denies the legitimacy of their claims, creating spaces in which experiences of struggle can be exchanged is powerful in itself.

The need to translate between different worlds and languages to achieve at least partial intelligibility created barriers for participation especially for indigenous and peasant women. This issue was made explicit in the Diálogos, for example, when an indigenous woman acknowledged that in a previous Diálogos event,

“many times we think many things but we do not say them, we do not express them for fear or because they could make fun of us or could say [things]. And another situation is that I want to say something and I do not know how to say it; therefore, I rather stay silent and accept the things that I see.” (PDTG 2010, 42)

During a conversation with an indigenous woman at the Diálogos that are at the center of my analysis, she echoes this sentiment, telling me that

“[s]ometimes, I am lacking the words. I would have liked to ask the compañeros, but I lacked the words and so I kept quiet. I would love to know more.” (Fieldwork diary, §866)

Her lack of education, which she underlines several times in the conversation, made her feel incapable of articulating her desire to learn. Listening, however, was powerful in creating hope and the feeling of sharing struggles, as she affirmed:

“I loved to learn from and listen to the experiences of the *compañeros*. I come from Puno and we did not know of the other struggles, we thought that it was only us who were in this, but listening to the *compañeros* from Bolivia, from Ecuador, Colombia, seeing that they are the same struggles, we are not alone.” (fieldwork diary, §867).

Because the *Diálogos* linked experience to emotion, translation – at least on an emotional level – is made possible even without intelligibility, as a trans activist that I spoke to also underlined: “[The *Diálogos* are] something that touches the persons very much and brings them together with love” (interview 13/11/2014). But as the indigenous woman’s comment discussed above also shows, it seems to be easier to recognize oneself in those involved in similar struggles. The *Diálogos*, however, hold that emotions can bridge different struggles: “It was the affects created from the sharing of our experiences that allowed the profound and sincere dialogue between lesbians and indigenous leaders, for example.” (Daza et al. 2016, 83) Recognizing the shared humanity of *all* participants moved participants to acknowledge proximities that had been denied before. A lesbian activist, seeing that the indigenous women present “were strong women generating political practice, generating ideas” (interview 05/07/2016), for example, acknowledged her own Andean background and used it to build bridges to indigenous and peasant struggles. Positive emotions were underlined, which created an atmosphere conducive for listening and hearing. Yet, this emphasis on positive emotions made the articulation of unease or even rage difficult, hindering the confrontation of inequalities and discrimination.

The emphasis on conflict-turned-dispute in the EFLAC allowed for these emotions to be articulated. Accepting that different political positionings inevitably lead to conflict, dispute was also centered in the way the meeting was structured and facilitated. It was, therefore, possible to articulate frustration. Positing reflection as a tool for converting conflict into dispute, however, tended to serve as a governing tool to cover the contradictions of the encounter. On the one hand, the confrontations that marked the meeting were discursively converted to dispute and used as a proof that the encounter had “worked”, but criticism that targeted the structure of the encounter could not be made to count. When Afro-Latin women staged an intervention protesting their invisibility, their intervention was taken as a call to further “commit to rethinking processes”

(fieldwork diary XIII EFLAC, 880), but did not lead to changes in the structures the women had protested against. On the other hand, the disengagement of indigenous and peasant women from the EFLAC, as evidenced by their decreasing presence in the morning plenaries as well the decrease in contributions from indigenous and peasant women, was not even recognized as an issue. In the report on the EFLAC, the organizers write:

“The indigenous women present in the EFLAC proposed to open a debate about the realities and demands from different visions and cosmovisions: it is necessary to decolonize feminism, propose new forms of relating ourselves, recognizing the contributions of both movements and establishing common points of action: the struggle against all forms of violence, discrimination and racism, the impunity, the violation of human rights.” (13 EFLAC 2014c, 74)

There was no declaration of indigenous and peasant feminists and the contributions that were made were rather heterogeneous. They, therefore, seem to have “proposed to open a debate” by their mere presence. The evaluation of the encounter by the organizers in general shows how they were able to fix the meaning of conflicts in a way that allowed them to not question their conduct or the structure of the encounter: When talking to them after the EFLAC, they overwhelmingly characterized the encounter as “lovely” and “without conflict” (fieldwork diary, §971pp.), even though there had been several conflicts that had structured the interactions at the encounter, among them the conflict about whether to allow male-identified trans activists to participate. Arguably, the encounter had also ended with a split in the Latin American feminist movement between the autonomous faction of the communitarian feminists and a more institutional faction (see Leinius 2020).

The Rootedness of Solidarity Across Difference

One obstacle to building solidarity across difference in both meetings was the continued influence of the “lettered city”: Literary critic Angel Rama (1996) uses this term to denote how in Latin America, notions of progress and modernity are intermeshed with processes of racialization and patriarchy to create a powerful dichotomy between the city as the “locus par excellence of modernity and the cradle of the (lettered) intellectual” (Aparicio/Blaser 2008, 71) and the countryside as a stand-in for “the traditional or primitive and its stereotyped incarnation, the Indian” (Aparicio/Blaser 2008, 71). In the logic of the lettered city, education, literacy, and urbanity are seen as characteristics of the modern, “white” individual living in the city, who possesses a “natural” superiority over

the rural or indigenous subject (Schutte 2011, 190). Class politics intermesh with the logics of the lettered city to create exclusions.

In both encounters, Spanish served as the exclusive language of communication. Translation mainly meant translation from and to other dominant languages, and not the indigenous languages spoken in Peru. In the EFLAC, translation services were organized for English, Portuguese, and French. In the *Diálogos*, some of the academic participants spoke a mix of Spanish and Portuguese, assuming that everyone present would understand them effortlessly. Indigenous languages were present in symbolic gestures, such as greetings, but were not intelligible as a mode of communication. The organizers of the *Diálogos* recognized the issue, as one of my interview partners confirmed:

“Everybody speaks Spanish, well, because normally, the Quechuas are bilingual. We are the monolinguals, in this way we are more- our communicative capacities are poorer than theirs. But at the same time, it is very different when one speaks in one’s mother tongue than when one speaks a second language, your expressive capacity frees itself, and this is particularly strong in women, because they tend to be the ones that speak less Spanish and the ones that are more marginalized in the processes.” (interview 19/11/2014).

They did not actively engage in finding a way to mitigate the exclusions tied to the normalization of Spanish, however. The “lack of words” diagnosed by the indigenous participant of the *Diálogos* I quoted above is, on the immediate level, a matter of language. On a deeper level, it is intermeshed with configurations of space, class, gender, and education. The “expert” panels and discussion rounds of the EFLAC, for example, mirrored the format of an academic conference. The Political Manifesto, in tone and style, was an academic treatise that, though it was framed as an invitation to debate for all women of Latin America, interpellated mainly educated feminists. While not necessarily the intent of the organizers, those not addressed were cast as lacking the capacity to engage in the dispute striven for. They were welcome to bring their difference as a resource, but were not included in the community of feminists able to make their voice count. Similarly, the *Diálogos* positioned “experts” in both plenary sessions, and participants were supposed to direct their contributions to the issues that were identified as most urgent by the organizers. Discussions were geared towards translating between concepts stemming from academic worlds – such as extractivism and patriarchy – and the embodied experiences of the participants. Group work, which was seen as a primary space for the exchange of experiences, the creation of affect, and of learning, was conditioned on the need to produce results to be presented in the plenaries. This privileged those familiar

with abstraction and systematization, fluent in Spanish and comfortable with speaking in front of large audiences.⁸

The Amazon region and its peoples remained invisible in both meetings: They were not mentioned in the report on the EFLAC, no Amazonian representative had been invited to speak at the panels, and there was only one workshop⁹ that referred to the Amazon as a point of identification. In the EFLAC program, the workshop is described as organized solely by Spanish feminists, invisibilizing the Amazon even further. While it is difficult to estimate how many Amazonian women attended the EFLAC, as the only marker of identity asked about when registering was country of origin, the high travel costs from the Amazon region to Lima might have inhibited the participation of those who might have wanted to attend. The conditionality of the granting of stipends – they were allocated with preference to organizations that had participated in one of the three pre-encounters, all of which took place in cities in the Andean highlands – also increased the threshold of participation. The invisibility of the Amazon is also observable in the *Diálogos*. The PDTG has a close relationship with the eco-territorial struggles in the Andean highlands and invited indigenous and peasant participants from these regions. There have been efforts to approach the Amazonian movements, but, as a former member of the PDTG stated, “we did not have a link to the Amazonian movement” (interview 05/11/2014). Additionally, the federations in the regions were not interested in participating in initiatives they perceived as steered by “urban” activists.

Conclusion

Solidarity across difference does not emerge spontaneously but is tied to the organizational decisions, discursive logics, and pedagogical practices that structure how subjects encounter each other. There are aspects that heighten the possibilities for solidarity across difference, among them recognizing the partiality of knowledge and experience, the interdependency between struggles, a desire to learn from each other, and a willingness to use one’s imagination to stand in for that which remains unintelligible. Encounters across difference oriented towards mutual learning, creating affect, and emphasizing the multiplicity of identities can therefore be powerful in contesting the distancing of place and

⁸ This was recognized as a continuing issue to be challenged by the organizers.

⁹ The workshop was called “Self-knowledge about Menstruation” and was organized by the feminist collective “Amazons for the Amazon” (Las Amazonas por Amazonas). Based in the city of Iquitos, they describe themselves as a “feminist collective that creates spaces for the personal and artistic development between women”. It appears to be a joint project of young Spanish and Peruvian feminists (Las Amazonas por Amazonas 2017).

history that reifies exclusive identity categories. When difference is contained in prefigured boxes and seen as the property of certain groups instead of a relationally constructed marker, the terrain for solidarity across difference shrinks, as the dynamics at the EFLAC have shown. The desire to maintain control of what was happening at all times during the EFLAC, I would argue, resulted in the encounter reinforcing the certainties of the organizers. This made “opacity feel like transparency and ignorance like knowledge”, as Marguerite Waller has described the repercussions of the feminist tendency to privilege stability (Waller/Marcos 2005, xxv). Marginalizations and exclusions were not recognized as such, which inhibited critical reflection on one’s own positions within power relations that were posited as a central capacity in the organizers’ discourse. To challenge this view, a perspective that asks about power and privilege is needed; a perspective that asks, “Up to what point does [the encounter] not turn into another space of specialization for some who know very well how to conduct themselves there, well, and not a place of more collective creation” (interview 22/06/2016)? This continuous critical questioning is at the root of enabling practices of solidarity-building across difference that neither reify nor mobilize difference as a resource but, instead, as a starting point for mutually discovering commonalities and intersections in the fight for emancipation.

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