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## Las curanderas de la herida abierta: how online communities of women of color are challenging coloniality

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*Las curanderas de la herida abierta: How online communities of women of color are challenging coloniality*

A Thesis

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## Abstract

Using Facebook and Instagram pages, women of color create virtual communities for epistemological transformations and community healing. In this thesis, I show that online communities of women of color constitute a decolonial feminist virtual space that serves as a site of knowledge production. I argue that these online communities can be conceptualized as a decolonial project existing and expanding from online spaces to public places and characterized by a deliberate rejection of anti-blackness, a critique of the capitalist/colonial/imperial world system, and liberating conceptions of sexuality and gender. I focus on *Latina Rebels*, *Xicanisma*, and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas* in order to examine the ways these spaces emerge as into discursive arenas whereby subjugated knowledges get centered, uplifted and validated. Through an analysis of three relationships – knowledge production and coloniality, knowledge production and the three platforms, and these three platforms and myself – I position these sites as feminist insurgencies that created an online Latina culture challenging the coloniality of knowledge production. I also engage in a systematic discourse analysis of posts curated by these three platforms to highlight the ways in which they actively challenge knowledges informed by discourses of colonial power.

**Keywords: coloniality, decoloniality, knowledge, women of color, feminism, social media**

## Introduction

At the beginning of 2014, I found a network of social media pages that changed my life in ways that I could not accurately articulate at the time. ‘Something’ was happening in these spaces and I didn’t have the words or ideas to identify it or process how it was affecting me. Once I entered my M.A. program in the fall of 2015, I found myself introduced to and increasingly equipped with theoretical tools and language to explain how I experienced and made sense of these spaces. This project, then, is the outcome of the reflective and analytical process of making sense of this experience and trying to understand online communities of women of color.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis examines three particular relationships that are related to this journey. First, it studies the relationship between knowledge production and coloniality. Building off the work of Walter D. Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, V.Y. Mudimbe, and others, this thesis analyzes the ways in which current knowledge practices have been and continue to be informed by coloniality. Second, it examines the relationship between online communities of women of color and knowledge production. The original and “shared” content that these pages post can be conceptualized as subjugated knowledges that have been given a platform - its own discursive arena - to be discussed and disseminated. Third, it studies my relationship to these online communities of women of color in order to set the ground work for 1) discussing the potential impact these online communities have on those who follow them, and 2) understanding the role academia plays in both offering tools for analysis and in which ways it can be highly inaccessible.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the phrase “online communities of women of color” in order to make space for all non-Latina members that engage with and learn from the content that these social media pages produce. By calling these spaces “online communities of Latinas”, I would run the risk of erasing Afro-Latinas and other groups that may not identify solely with the identity of “Latina”.

Through the analysis of these three sets of relationships, I show that online communities of women of color constitute a decolonial feminist virtual space that serves as a site of knowledge production. These online communities can be conceptualized as a decolonial project existing and expanding from online spaces to public places and characterized by a deliberate rejection of anti-blackness, a critique of the capitalist/colonial/imperial world system, and liberating conceptions of sexuality and gender. This thesis draws on decolonial thought, feminist literature and traveling theory in order to make these claims.

### ***Decolonial options***

Decoloniality emerged in response to the manifestation of coloniality that began in sixteenth century - colonization.<sup>2</sup> It is grounded in body-politics and geo-politics in order to highlight persistent colonial structures masked as modernity. Through a framework of body-politics and geo-politics, a decolonial analysis focuses on who is speaking and from where they are speaking. It requires a theory of the flesh, “one where the physical realities of our lives — our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings — all fuse to create a politic born of necessity.”<sup>3</sup> And, it requires thinking “from and at the margins”<sup>4</sup> of power and an emphasis on the material reality of marginalized groups.

Decoloniality can be understood as a framework whereby “decolonial options [are] confronting and delinking from coloniality.”<sup>5</sup> Coloniality can be understood as the,

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<sup>2</sup> Mignolo, Walter. “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial option: A Manifesto.” *Transmodernity* 1 no. 2 (2011): 44-66.

<sup>3</sup> Moraga, Cherrie, Gloria Anzaldúa. *This Bridge Called My Back: Fourth Edition*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> Mignolo, Walter. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), xviii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, xviii.

...system and worldview [whose] fundamental tasks included colonial expansion, the colonial reconceptualization of physical and human geography, the recreation, intensification and naturalization of hierarchies of being that divide some humans from others, and the subordination of people and nature to the demands of production and accumulation.<sup>6</sup>

Coloniality encompasses logic, legacy and action. It can be read as a logic that underlies knowledge practices, embeds itself within institutions and facilitates violence on an epistemic and physical level. This particular system and worldview continues to exist. It can also be understood as denial.<sup>7</sup> It is the denial of space, place, history and humanity. This is achieved by having the power to construct knowledge about, enact violence against, and continue to control the other. Decoloniality aims to particularize the European gaze and detach from the universalization of European thought.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, decolonial interventions require a transformation of European modes of thinking and producing knowledge, as universal, certain, and incontestable. Decolonial thought does not call for demonization or negation of European modes of thinking. Rather, it challenges the totalizing tendency and normalization of European modes of thinking and highlights the underlying power relations. A critical component of European thought separates the observer from the observed and sets up a series of dichotomies: self/other, subject/object, human/non-human.<sup>9</sup> This type of epistemic practice divided the world into two: the colonizers and the colonized. Frantz Fanon states, "The colonial world is a compartmentalized word."<sup>10</sup> This compartmentalization, this "thingification"<sup>11</sup>, produced

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<sup>6</sup> Maldonado- Torres, Nelson. Decoloniality at Large: Towards a Trans-Americas and Global Transmodern Paradigm. *Transmodernity* 1 no. 1 (2012): 1-9.

<sup>7</sup> Lugones, María. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia* 25, no.4 (2010) : 742-759.

<sup>8</sup> Mignolo, Walter. "Delinking." *Cultural Studies* 21 no. 3 (2007): 449-514.

<sup>9</sup> Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988)

<sup>10</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 3.



knowledge about the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer identifies as the self and the colonized has been conceptualized as the other. The colonizer is the observing subject while the colonized remains the object being studied. The colonizer is human while the colonized is not. The Manichean divide sets up knowledge as black and white, as good and bad. The colonizer is good and the colonized is bad.<sup>12</sup> This results in the dehumanization of the colonized subject. Fanon suggests, "...the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil."<sup>13</sup> Once this has been achieved, the "other" can remain controlled, policed and oppressed. The production of the other is crucial in the sustainability of the modern/colonial world system we inhabit. Decoloniality can be understood as a critical theory – whereby the de-colonial option is a specific orientation of doing.<sup>14</sup> I conceptualize decoloniality as praxis – that is, theory and practice. It's a praxis that operates in response to and against the colonial structures and ways of understanding knowledge, power, being and life itself.

The concept of the colonial matrix of power is helpful in describing the ways in which coloniality operates to sustain and maintain power in the global social order. Similar to Patricia Hill Collins' notion of the matrix of domination<sup>15</sup>, the colonial matrix of power considers the oppressive intersections that facilitate colonial realities. Four domains of control exist: control of economy, control of authority, control of gender and sexuality and control of subjectivity and knowledge. In terms of the economy, land appropriation,

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<sup>11</sup>Cesaire, Aime. *Discourse on Colonialism*. (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 2000)

<sup>12</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Escobar, Arturo, Walter D. Mignolo. *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. (New York: Routledge 2010)

<sup>15</sup> Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000)

exploitation of laborers and jurisdiction over life sustaining natural resources are crucial in sustaining control over economic development. On an authoritative note, institutions and armed forces such as the army, navy, and police departments operate within coloniality as they regulate, control and police people's behaviors. Those who are largely targeted are marginalized groups – primarily people of color, queer folk and low-income communities. The concept of coloniality also demonizes and criminalizes those who do not fall into the heteronormative, patriarchal system that champions the nuclear family and the man. Same-sex marriage, sodomy laws, and transgender bathroom issues highlight the domain of control over sexuality and gender. Lastly, European notions of rationality that rely on dualism and the split between object/subject inform the ways in which knowledge and subjectivity is produced. As a result, “the relationship between European culture and other cultures was established and has been maintained, as a relation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’.”<sup>16</sup> Although this distinction still continues, it is not all encompassing and there is room for resistance. Coloniality operates within these four domains of control but its power remains challenged. This thesis focuses on the ways in which the online communities of women of color that I am examining attempt to heal the wounds coloniality has caused.

The colonial wound is another important analytical tool theorized by decolonial scholars that examines the ways in which colonial relationships produce epistemic, physical and emotional wounds. This concept refers to the ways in which coloniality wounds, hurts, and damages anything it touches. When the implications of coloniality are framed in such a way, we can have a better understanding of the violence at work. Racial

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<sup>16</sup> Quijano, Anibal. “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 168-178.

classifications and hierarchy are colonial wounds. The rhetoric of colonization, salvation and modernity is a colonial wound.<sup>17</sup> Framing the implications of colonization and coloniality as a wound yields up a critical, empathetic way to analyze racism, sexism, and a myriad of other ideologies. Wounds can be reopened and worsened if not cared for properly. Wounds need to be tended too and carefully monitored in order to heal. Frantz Fanon does not use the direct phrase of the colonial wound in his work, yet we can see Fanon theorizing it through his description of what colonization does to the psyche of both the colonized and the colonizer.<sup>18</sup> The colonial wound is a constant thread in this thesis. The following section looks at a brief trajectory of modern day feminism and points to three influential Latina feminists, *las curanderas*, who attempt to heal various colonial wounds in their work.

### ***Feminist Theory***

Feminism does not have a singular origin, definition or overall agreed upon historical timeline. Multiple feminisms emerged at different times in history, although their emergences have not been historically situated that way. The historical timeline of feminism traditionally gets separated into three waves – with a fourth wave being debated. The three waves are loosely conceptualized as beginning with the (white) women’s suffrage movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s, followed by the sexual liberation movement starting in the 60s, and then the third wave commencing in the early 90s until today. However, women of color have had feminist interventions throughout and between

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<sup>17</sup> Vazquez, Rolando, Walter Mignolo. “Decolonial Aesthetics: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings.” *Social Text- Periscope*. (2013) [https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/](https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/decolonial-aesthetics-colonial-woundsdecolonial-healings/)

<sup>18</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 181.

the three “waves” of feminism. Women of color often reject the notion of the three waves since the formation of women of color feminisms does not fit within that timeline. One of the most iconic books, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, came out in the 1980s – outside of the supposed third wave of feminism. The book was the first to feature writings by women of color on the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality. It was this anthology that allowed space for women of color interventions in academia and in the discourse around feminism.

For this thesis, Latina feminist thought is most appropriate for understanding the trajectory of my argument. I contend that notions of borderthinking, Chicana feminist mestizaje, and world-travelling are part of a specific thread in Latina feminist thought that point to an inclusive Latina feminist epistemology that I consider related to decoloniality and to a decolonial feminism. The notion of borderthinking is crucial when engaging in decolonial work, since it problematizes the categorical confines of coloniality. Anzaldúa’s notion of borderthinking analyzes the epistemic and geographical borders that produces a new way of knowing – a mestiza way of knowing. She says, “the new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity...she learns to juggle cultures.”<sup>19</sup> This new way of thinking is rooted in the historical development of modernity, and centers the real life experiences of women at the intersection of multiple oppressive systems. Anzaldúa goes on to describe this type of thinking as “creating a new mythos – that is, a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves and the ways we behave.”<sup>20</sup> Anzaldúa focuses on facilitating new ways to think about the world and about

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<sup>19</sup>Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), p. 79.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, p. 80.

the self. Walter Dignolo, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Ramón Grosfoguel adopted and expanded Anzaldúa's work on borderthinking to further conceptualize what it means to think in the borderlands.

Building on the idea of the *mestiza*, a Chicana feminist *mestizaje* is a "theory and method for mobilizing oppositional forms of consciousness in the post-modern first world."<sup>21</sup> Chela Sandoval historicizes this type of consciousness and discusses where this type of consciousness falls within the five points of resistance to the U.S social hierarchy. The five points of resistance are the assimilationist (liberal mode), the revolutionary (insurgent) mode, the supremacist (cultural-nationalist) mode, the separatist mode and the differential (*mestiza*/womanist/third force) mode.<sup>22</sup> She makes the claim that "the last, differential mode that enabled U.S feminists of color to understand and utilize the previous four, not as overriding strategies but as tactics for intervening and transforming social relations."<sup>23</sup> Sandoval describes this as a particular praxis that utilizes each of these resistant ideologies as a prospective technology of power aimed at achieving a particular goal. In closing, Sandoval speaks of this type of methodology, the method of *mestizaje*, as having the possibility to facilitate resistance, similar to the work of Lugones. The women of color online communities I examine adopt the differential mode of which Sandoval speaks in the way they choose to engage in their resistance.

Lastly, the concept of world-traveling attempts to dismantle the logic of oppression and make room for loving coalitions across differences. Maria Lugones proposes that there are those who are outsiders that need to move between worlds. In some of these worlds,

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<sup>21</sup> Sandoval, Chela. *Mestizaje as Method: Feminists-of-color: Changing the Canon. Living Chicana Theory*, ed. Carla Trujillo (Berkeley: Third Women Press,1998): p. 352-370.

<sup>22</sup> Sandoval, *Mestizaje as Method*, p. 360.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 360.

the outside feels at home. For others, they travel to the worlds by necessity and survival. She recognizes that the traveling sometimes happens unwillingly and she aims to reclaim world-traveling in order to engage with it in a playful, and loving manner. The lack of insight into other resistant experiences, strategies and methods leaves us colluding with the logic of oppression in the first place. The outcome of the logic of oppression results in social fragmentation and hierarchies. Lugones's proposal of world-traveling aims to facilitate this "interdependently resistant" ethos. The worlds in question are not utopias. They are complex, sometimes imaginary, and contentious. She describes these worlds as such:

For something to be a "world" in my sense, it has to be inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people. That is why it cannot be a utopia...[it] may be an actual society, given its dominant culture's description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a "world" can also be such a society given a nondominant, a resistant construction, or it can be such a society or a society given an idiosyncratic construction.<sup>24</sup>

For Lugones, worlds are contingent upon occupants and their perceptions of those worlds. The act of world-traveling is an act of seeing the outsider as a subject, as one that can no longer be ignored.

Interrogating notions of subjectivity, knowledge, and identity formation remain prominent themes in Latina feminist thought. The above-mentioned concepts come from decolonial thought and are indicative of a move towards a decolonial feminism. Decolonial feminism focuses primarily on the coloniality of gender – that is, the analysis of racialized, capitalist, and gendered oppression of the colonial subject. Maria Lugones suggests "the

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<sup>24</sup>Lugones, María. "Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2 no.2 (1987): 3-19, p. 9-10.

modern, colonial, gender system as a lens through which to theorize further the oppressive logic of coloniality, its use of hierarchical dichotomies and categorical logic."<sup>25</sup> It is against this very logic of coloniality that Sandoval and Anzaldúa's work can be read. They start with conceptions of the self and move towards a collective renewed consciousness as resistance. The coloniality of gender lacks a sufficient analysis from other decolonial scholars, and these women of color aim to construct a theoretical framework that addresses this pertinent intersection. The online communities of women of color that I study can be seen to engage in this specific Latina feminist thought. Therefore, I consider these online communities of color as creators of decolonial online spaces. When I say decolonial online spaces, I am referring to the ways in which technology can be used to create a decolonial project.

A project can be understood as a "twofold relationship with an existing state of affairs."<sup>26</sup> A project attempts to accomplish two things – destroy that which already exists while simultaneously trying to create something more positive that does not currently exist.<sup>27</sup> It's a process of destruction and creation rolled into one, messy endeavor. When I speak of a decolonial project, I envision that project destroying coloniality and allowing for full humanity to be achieved. It's the destruction of a colonial logic that negates humanity and the creation of a decolonial logic that allows for the full spectrum of humanity to be experienced and validated. The decolonial project that exists online are deliberate and created out of practice. Online spaces are not inherently colonial or decolonial. The ways in which they are utilized to share information and organize and create content constitute

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<sup>25</sup>Lugones, *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*, p. 746.

<sup>26</sup> Macey, David. *Frantz Fanon: A biography*. (London: Verso, 2000), p. 473.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 473.

whether it can be decolonial or not. Online communities of women of color create spaces that deliberately reject anti-blackness; other folks can weaponize online spaces to deliberately advocate for white supremacy. For example, It's a matter of analyzing these spaces within critical frameworks to delineate which is which.

### ***Traveling Theory***

Edward Said's essay on *Traveling Theory* is central to my argument for two reasons. For one, the term decoloniality was coined in the 1990s so it is a relatively new term in the academic sphere. The literature on decoloniality is nowhere near as vast as other frameworks such as post-colonialism or Marxism. It's still in the process of being fleshed out, reconsidered, conceptualized and re-conceptualized. Secondly, Said's notion of traveling theory suggests that theory can never be complete. There are a multitude of fragmented social realities, experiences that cannot ever be fully addressed by theory. By positing theories as never being complete, we reduce the risk of reification and constantly interrogate the subjects in question. Reification is described as, "both a false objectivity so far as knowledge was concerned and a deformation thoroughly penetrating life and consciousness more than any other form."<sup>28</sup> While I discuss 'women of color' I am reminded of the importance of avoiding reification in order to stay true to the decolonial form and critically capture the possibilities within these communities.

Traveling theory discusses how theory travels through historical periods, national cultures, different types of people, and different situations. Said contends that when theories travel there are "processes of representation and institutionalization different

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<sup>28</sup> Said, Edward. "Traveling Theory." In *The World, The Text, And The Critic*, edited by Edward W. Said. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1983), p. 238.



from those at the point of origin.”<sup>29</sup> There are four stages to the way any theory or idea travels:

1. First, there is a point of origin. The point of origin is the “set of initial circumstances” where the theory entered the discourse. This refers to the historical moment(s) in which the theory transpired.
2. Secondly, there is a distance traversed. This refers to the various situations, contexts and events the idea moves through before it comes to a new importance.
3. Third, there is a set of conditions or “conditions of acceptance” or resistances that confront the theory “making possible its introduction or toleration.”<sup>30</sup>
4. Lastly, the theory, however accommodated, is used in a different way for the particular context and culture in which it has landed.

I do not aim to explain how decoloniality has traversed over the past 30 years to land where it is now. But I do aim to use travelling theory in order to allow for the possibility of seeing how decoloniality is incorporated and adapted by millennials across the diaspora through social media. This is part of a process of representation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The representation and institutionalization of decoloniality (the literature, publishing of work, projects etc.) emerged from academics in the “Third World”, but decoloniality has been taken up by a number of folks living in diasporas. Said advocates that when analyzing theory, we engage in a critical consciousness that reminds us how incomplete theory can be. This critical consciousness requires theory to be understood in its origin, how its working in and for it, being transported to other historical moments and uses, recognizes the resistances and uses, and aim to open it up to historical reality and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 226.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

lived experiences, utterances and pain.<sup>31</sup> The use of decoloniality by academics, scholars, and activists outside of the “Third World” can, at times, seem problematic since one of the characteristics decoloniality is associated with is “delinking” from western knowledge practices. But that standpoint is alarming since it upholds the reification of “the West” vs. “Third World” and ignores complexities of brown and black Diasporas. Walter Mignolo once wrote, “The point is, however, is not where you *reside* but where you  *dwell*.”<sup>32</sup> He recognized that famous decolonial writers such as Fanon and Césaire resided in Europe at the times of their most prolific writings. While the three platforms I am discussing operate in the United States, many of the administrators and followers dwell in the borderlands that Anzaldúa speaks of.

### **Theorizing autoetnografía-teoría**

For this thesis, I borrow from postcolonial, decolonial and feminist frameworks and utilize methodological tools including Foucauldian discourse analysis, content analysis, and auto-ethnographical writing. The three chapters utilize each of these tools to varying degrees, with a strong focus on discourse analysis throughout. To supplement the discourse analysis, I engage in brief auto-ethnographical snippets related to the themes or “isms” that I discuss. It’s important to note that the three online communities, *Latina Rebels*, *Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas*, are ever-changing, ever-growing and continuing to post as I write this thesis. New content becomes available each day. Therefore, the complexity of such spaces can only be captured using a combination of methodological tools. I wish to build upon Gloria Anzaldúa’s method of *autohistoria-teoría* to construct a method, which I will call *autoetnografía-teoría* that sets out to use the above-

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>32</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, p. xiii.

mentioned multiple frameworks and methodological tools to be able to capture the complexity of the relationships under investigation.

Anzaldúa describes autohistoria as “women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms.”<sup>33</sup> Within this thesis, the phrase “women of color” can be understood as a socio-political identity constituted through practices. Scholars, activists, and creatives use the term to refer to those (or themselves) who do not identify with White or European ancestry. The particular online communities that I am analyzing self-identify as communities of women of color, but intentionally create space for those whose brownness/blackness may be questioned and whose “womanhood” may be questioned as well. It’s important to note that the phrase “women of color” is not a fixed, reifying biological position, but rather an identity that comes out of a set of experiences, relationships and heritage. The multitude of experiences of women of color point to the importance of being able to express those experiences in spaces of generosity. Autohistoria’ holds that self-knowledge and self-reflexivity are inherently social and relational, and cannot be removed from scholarship. Further, Anzaldúa conceptualizes her notion of *autohistoria-teoria*, as the “theory...to describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection on [a] storytelling process.”<sup>34</sup> This type of approach to scholarship relies on utilizing different forms of theorizing in conversation with the writer’s own cultural and personal biographies. The consistent weaving of self to others encourages constant reflection and enables rewritings of the self and social, political and cultural spheres.

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<sup>33</sup>Anzaldúa, Gloria A. *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2015)

<sup>34</sup>Ibid, p. 241-242.

For the purposes of this project, I use Anzaldúa's conception of autohistoria applied to ethnography. Just as Anzaldúa attempts to delink from autobiography by using the Spanish term to describe her conceptualization, I will be using the Spanish term of auto-ethnography to illustrate my attempt at delinking. Therefore, my conception of *auto-etnografía* can be described as women of color interventions into and transformation of traditional ethnographical forms. According to Anzaldúa, only women of color are able to engage in this type of methodology because of their specific positionality and range of experiences. I am not aiming to homogenize the experiences of women of color, rather, I am suggesting that the majority of women of color deal with intersecting oppressions including race, gender, class, immigration status, and sexuality that mediate their experiences. In order to articulate, capture, and argue that subjugated knowledges are being produced in these spaces and that these spaces are characterized by a deliberate rejection of anti-blackness, a critique of the capitalist/colonial/imperial world system, and liberating conceptions of sexuality and gender, it is advantageous to analyze them using a decolonial methodology such as Anzaldúa's.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, *autoetnografía-teoría* can be conceptualized as the theory describing the relational ethnographic form of writing that consistently weaves the self with others and the world around them. In engaging with autoetnografía-teoría, the writer's positionality cannot be excluded from the relationships being examined. Autoetnografía-teoría rejects the notion that focusing on the self yields limited and unverifiable conclusions. The basic premise of this methodology rests on the fact that, historically, the folks being examined have not had space or time to construct their own historical

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<sup>35</sup>Hartley, George. "The Curandera of Conquest: Gloria Anzaldúa's Decolonial Remedy." *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 35 no. 1 (2010): 135-161.

narratives and representations. More specifically, women of color have struggled to construct their own truths and write their own histories.<sup>36</sup> Predominantly leftist spaces are not absolved from colonial logic. Within leftist spaces, women of color find white complicity within oppressive systems systematically silencing them. This approach to analyzing the epistemological and ontological implications of women of color online communities requires recognition of women of color interventions into particular discourses and narratives. It also demands that a critical theory be applied to the stories, theories and concepts being articulated.

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<sup>36</sup> Moraga, Anzaldúa. *This Bridge Called My Back*, p. vi..

## Chapter 1: The production of colonial knowledge

“We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things...”  
-Michel Foucault<sup>37</sup>

“The appearance of order means the disappearance of power. Power is to operate more and more in a manner that is slow, uninterrupted, and without external manifestation.”  
-Timothy Mitchell<sup>38</sup>

A central point of this thesis contends that women of color online communities serve as a site of knowledge production. When I talk about knowledge production, I am referring to the ways in which knowledge is produced. The term “knowledge” is a loaded term, and there are a multitude of different “knowledges” that can be referred to. Scientific knowledge, literary knowledge, cultural knowledge and historical knowledge are a few examples of the types of knowledges that exist. But what I am referring to is the way in which we come to understand the self and other. I am referring to the way we understand the relationships between the self/other and the world around us. Knowledge is produced within the confines of discourses of power. For the purpose of this thesis, I am using a Foucauldian conception of discourse to highlight the power dynamics at work in knowledge production. Women of color online communities are trying to challenge hegemonic discourses on blackness, capitalism and sexuality that are permeated by coloniality. Knowledge about these three topics is produced through a hegemonic discourse that abides by colonial logic and practices. This chapter analyzes the relationship between knowledge production and coloniality, and ties in the ways in which online communities of women of color are challenging this relationship.

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<sup>37</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), p. 229.

<sup>38</sup> Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 79.

### ***Discourses of Power***

Knowledge gets produced within the confines of discourse. A Foucauldian understanding of discourse points to three components: the way in which discourse sets the conditions of possibility, legitimates speakers and speech, and sets the stage for future discourses.<sup>39</sup> In these three components, hegemonic discourses delegitimize and silence alternative and subordinate discourses. For illustrative purposes, I use development discourse and discourse on the Chicano movement as examples of how hegemonic discourses silence, marginalize and enable discursive enclosures.

The conditions of possibility are the frameworks in which an issue or topic can be conceptualized, talked about, and worked over. The conditions refer to what might be possible and the conditions can be delimited by the hegemonic discourse that gives form to action. For example, the overarching framework that permeates development discourse relies on modernity.<sup>40</sup> Development as a modernization paradigm relies on a development-as-progress model, as goals to be attained, as an accumulative social model to be achieved. But first, old social orders must become obsolete so that new orders can be instilled. Previous forms of social organization must be removed in order for this particular mode of social organization can be in place. Colonialism destroys old social orders and development is there to create new order. In the case of Egypt, one would have to define the problem as social dislocation creating impoverished people along with a solution, which was addressing this social dislocation with a new form of social order. Once the British destroyed the social order through colonization, they began to create schools, roads, buildings along with establishing agricultural enclaves and military bases so that they can

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<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

<sup>40</sup> Cowen, M.P., R.W Shenton. *Doctrines of Development*. (New York: Routledge. 1996).

monitor, discipline and control the dislocated Egyptians – all in the name of progress for the Egyptian people.<sup>41</sup>

The second aspect of discourse deals with the legitimization of speakers and speeches. Discourse legitimizes, validates and rationalizes particular speakers/actors and their utterances. In terms of development, “experts” on international development are the legitimized speakers; their utterances are get constituted as knowledge. The United Nations remains a key institution that generates experts and knowledge about sustainable development. Two important policy documents, *Agenda 21* and *Programme of Action*, produced knowledge about development and contributed to the larger discursive arena. Within the particular development discourse, these types of documents influenced initiatives, action plans and development projects. A critical examination of these particular documents, centering the implications of the discourse on the knowledge that is produced, highlights the ways in which the documents “perpetuate gendered and racialized narratives of victimhood and (in)security, related to persuasive discourses of (sexual) self-restraint, through the rhetoric of sustainable development”.<sup>42</sup> International and local development agencies used these two policy agendas to enforce a set of narratives on real bodies in Third World countries, under the guise of economic security, population control, and sustainability. The discourse of development that relies on modernity sets the conditions of possibility for this particular rhetoric to control, discipline and monitor bodies of people.

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<sup>41</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> Foster, Emma A. “International sustainable development policy: (re)producing sexual norms through eco-discipline. *A Journal of Feminist Geography*. 21 no. 4 (2013):1029-1044, p. 1029.



The last aspect of discourse focuses on the ways in which discourse sets the conditions of possibility for future discourses. Discourse not only structures what is said, but also what is possible to say. The possibility for future discourses is predicated upon what is said in current the discourse. Discourses on development continue to be guided by modernity whether it's manifested in world systems theory, sustainable development models or even post-colonial critiques on development. An example of the relationship between discourse and power is the discourse on the Chicano movement.

The discourse of the Chicano movement homogenized the Chicano experience and systematically erased Chicanas from the movement. Discourse on the Chicano movements set the conditions of possibility of how the movement could be talked about. In this case, the discourse on the Chicano movement centers machismo (patriarchy) and Chicano nationalism. The historiography of the Chicano movement "has been organized around the cosmology of male heroes that reifies the "great man" narrative and interpretive structure."<sup>43</sup> These heroes are readily identified and known by name – Cesar Chavez, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, and Reies López Tijerina. The same way Fred Hampton was the identifiable male hero of the Black Panthers and Jose "Cha Cha" Jimenez was the male hero of the Young Lords Party. The men in these movements were selected to have historical significance; while the work of the women in the movements was framed to not have any historical significance. The discourse on the Chicano movement framed the movement in such a way that Chicano nationalism, and its subsequent heroes, was to be the central history to be discussed. These figures were also the speakers that were legitimized within the discourse. Women are often rendered silent or deliberately ignored and their

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<sup>43</sup> Blackwell, Maylei. *Chicana power!: contested histories of Feminism in the Chicano movement*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), p. 28.

contributions become lost in history until someone decides to excavate them. The focus on women of color in this thesis is a direct result of this trend. Before the contributions of *Xicanisma*, *Latina Rebels*, and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas* get rendered unintelligible and unimportant, I intend to contour and validate their work and its significance.

Chicanos in the movement were validated in both social activist circles and in academia. These two spaces were the dominant sites of knowledge production about the movement – it is no surprise that the knowledge being produced did not center the work and contributions of Chicanas in the movement. Having no room for women and women’s experiences within the movement set the stage for further research on the movement in male-dominated disciplines in academia via Latino Studies/Chicano Studies programs. The same heroes, narratives and experiences were discussed – largely leaving out the crucial historical significance of the Chicanas in the movement. This is the violence that discourse can do – it enables closures, flattens complexities, and renders particular groups meaningless. However, it also can produce meaning, facilitate discussion and enable resistance.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Discourses of [Colonial] Power***

Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse remains a powerful tool in understanding the link between knowledge and power, and engaging in deliberate actions and strategies to interrogate the discourse in the hopes of finding discursive openings and new ways of understanding. The order of things can be structured and organized, thereby allowing the possibility of restructuring and reorganizing. Discourse creates boundaries in that process

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<sup>44</sup> El-Malik, Shiera S. “Why orientalism still matters: Reading ‘casual forgetting’ and ‘active remembering’ as neoliberal forms of contestation in international politics.” *Review of International Studies*. 41(2015): 503-525.

of ordering and categorizing<sup>45</sup> – but that doesn't mean those boundaries cannot be transcended, destroyed or altered. Foucault contends that hegemonic discourses are discourses of power. Knowledge production regarding these topics is created within the confines of a discourse of power, which in this case I argue is colonial power. The deliberate centering of a “colonial power” in the relationship between power and discourse is my attempt at highlighting a specific logic at work that should not be overlooked, dismissed, or an afterthought. I would add that discourses on race, gender, sexuality, and nation are all constituted within colonial logic that abides by colonial principles on racial classification, reification and modernity. Discourses of colonial power are territorial, imperial and violent in nature.<sup>46</sup> As noted by Anibal Quijano, one of the defining elements of colonial thinking rests upon the social classification of groups based on race.<sup>47</sup> The inferior racial classification of black and brown bodies justified their free labor. While formal colonization can be understood as absolute, the colonial logic persists and informs knowledge practices and production. In Ava DuVernay's documentary, *13<sup>th</sup>*, she looks at the way mass incarceration intersects with race and justice in the United States. Named after the amendment that abolished slavery, *13<sup>th</sup>* explores the ways in which the logic of colonization and slavery inform practices in our justice system today –including criminalizing behaviors which produced high African-American incarceration rates and the

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<sup>45</sup> Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, p. 63.

<sup>46</sup> Mignolo, Walter. “Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial option: A Manifesto.” *Transmodernity* 1 no. 2 (2011): 44-66; Grosfoguel, Ramón. “Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking and Global Coloniality.” *Transmodernity* 1 no. 1 (2011): 1-37.

<sup>47</sup> Quijano, Anibal. “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America.” *International Sociology* 15, no.2 (2000): 215-232.

prison industrial complex as a whole. While slavery has formally ended<sup>48</sup>, the colonial logic that criminalizes and imprisons black bodies undergirds the current prison industrial complex. Without an intersectional look at the criminal justice system, these relationships between race, justice and incarceration would be overlooked.

Intersectionality<sup>49</sup> is a powerful tool in challenging discourses of colonial power, and online communities of women of color are utilizing that tool in their production of subjugated knowledges<sup>50</sup>. Women of color online communities are deliberately challenging the colonial discourse about racism, capitalism/imperialism, gender and sexuality). These communities are engaging in this project in a particular, unapologetic way that includes reclamation of terms and identity formation through practice. Colonial power dynamics created the racial classification of white vs. black, self vs. other, human vs. less human. The online communities I examine are still holding up these racial distinctions through the content they create and post. Identity indicators such as Black, Afro-Latina, Mixed, Brown, etc. are utilized in order to create a political stance and position themselves within a particular power dynamic that needs to be highlighted and addressed. The identifying terms are not inherently colonial, but the discourses they operate within render the terms a particularly negative meaning. I will show that these women of color online communities aim to create a discursive opening whereby “Black” does not equate to sub-human or less-human. Instead, their consistent commentary on “Blackness” situates “Black” as human, as

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<sup>48</sup> I say “formally” because modern day informal slavery still exists. See: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-43153226>

<sup>49</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality but the Combahee River Collective first articulated the concept in their original statement. The Combahee River Collective. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and The Combahee River Collective*, ed. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. Chicago:Haymarket Books, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberle. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43 no. 6 (1991): 1241-1299.

excellence, as power. They achieve this by continuing to point out anti-blackness while simultaneously uplifting Black folks through sharing their work, stories, and experiences.

Discourses of colonial power are constantly being interrogated by online communities of women of color through political strategies and epistemic disobedience. In this chapter, I discussed discourses of colonial power and looked at the ways in which discourse informs knowledge practices. Discourse, while powerful and resilient, is not all encompassing. Moving forward with a critical consciousness, it is possible to find discursive openings that allow for other types of knowledges to exist and become an option - not an alternative, but an option. Alternatives rely on the assumption that there is a “point of reference instead of a set of existing options.”<sup>51</sup> In the next chapter, I will further examine how these women of color online communities create discursive openings whereby the decolonial option carries legitimacy.

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<sup>51</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, xxviii.

## Chapter 2: Women of color and discursive openings

“There's really no such thing as the 'voiceless'. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.”  
-Arundhati Roy<sup>52</sup>

“The subaltern speaks, but not to you bitches.”  
-Multiple twitter accounts/memes of Gayatri Spivak<sup>53</sup>

With the rise of social media, it is easier than ever to create, share, and appreciate content. It's easier to communicate, connect and form relationships with people across the world. David Harvey coined the term time-space compression, which refers to phenomenon that reworks spatial and temporal relationships.<sup>54</sup> The Internet is one type of phenomena that significantly altered the way the world is connected. Knowledge can be shared in a way that was impossible before– it can be shared in milliseconds between people in the United States and Bolivia, or between Germany and the Philippines. Time and space are compressed, almost rendered non-existent by the sheer speed of information sharing technologies. Because of this, the content and knowledge that online communities of women of color produce are worthy of study. In this chapter, I analyze the relationship between women of color online communities and knowledge production. Women of color online communities constitute a decolonial feminist virtual sphere, and in that sphere, subjugated knowledges are produced, uplifted, and centered and healing is made possible.

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<sup>52</sup> Arundhati Roy, “Peace and the new corporate liberation theology” (Lecture, The 2004 Sydney Peace Prize Lecture, Sydney, Australia, November 3, 2004)

<sup>53</sup> <https://memegenerator.net/instance/11778791/judging-spivak-the-subaltern-speaks-but-not-to-you-bitches>

<sup>54</sup> Harvey, David. *The Conditions of Postmodernity*. (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1990), p. 260.

***Feminist Insurgences: from paper to online***

Drawing from the work of Maylei Blackwell, I show how these online communities of women of color can be conceptualized as feminist insurgencies that operate similar to the Chicana print culture that existed during the Chicano movement in the 60s and 70s. This Chicana print culture “coincided with the movimiento imperative to create alternative knowledges, parallel institutions and cultural formations.”<sup>55</sup> The online communities of women of color that I examine are engaging in that same imperative. Blackwell’s “new historiographic framework that theorizes the multiple feminist insurgencies of women of color by looking beyond ‘the’ women’s liberation movement as the only site that produced ‘real’ feminisms,”<sup>56</sup> situates these online spaces as valid sites of knowledge production. Online communities of women of color operate outside of what is understood as mainstream feminism, similar to how Chicanas operated outside the confines of the Chicano movement.

Mainstream feminism is typically associated with the strand of feminist thought known as liberal feminism or, how it is often referred to today, “white women’s feminism.”<sup>57</sup> The white liberal feminist theoretical framework focuses on notions of equality, freedom and access. This type of feminism emerged during the suffrage movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s and is most famously associated with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other suffragettes. The securitizations of rights and freedom are entrusted in the state through legislation and other formal means of the state

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<sup>55</sup> Blackwell, *Chicana power*, p. 137.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

<sup>57</sup> Elkholey, Sharon N. “Feminism and Race in the United States” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Accessed November 5, 2017. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/fem-race/>

apparatus. Liberal feminist theory relies heavily on the state to ensure equality in a number of social institutions and gender equality in the public sphere is of main interest.<sup>58</sup>

One prominent example of this type of feminism occurred during the Women's March, which was held on January 20, 2017. The march was criticized for the use of trans-exclusionary language, essentialist tones of womanhood via signs and chants, and support of local law enforcement.<sup>59</sup> Women of color collectives and communities have critiqued the Women's March for operating within that liberal feminist framework. I agree with this critique. I participated in the Women's March and the iconic pink pussy hat is one of the key indicators of a narrow definition of womanhood. Not all women have pink vaginas. Not all women have vaginas at all. Womanhood isn't predicated on primary sex characteristics. Furthermore, the support of local law enforcement – the hugging and high-fives – point to a pertinent difference in feelings of safety and protection. While white woman may feel safe around law enforcement, women of color, immigrant women, sex workers and other marginalized groups may not share that same sentiment. My father is a Chicago Police SWAT Officer and I am well aware that I feel safe around police for that simple fact. I do not run the risk of being a victim of police misconduct or brutality. Instead, I will always receive special treatment because of my familial ties. This is not a common reality for brown girls protesting and it is a privilege I continue to reflect on.

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<sup>58</sup> Mann, Susan Archer. *Doing Feminist Theory*. (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)

<sup>59</sup> Ramanathan, Lavanya. "Was the Women's March just another display of white privilege? Some think so". Accessed April 4, 2017 ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/was-the-womens-march-just-another-display-of-white-privilege-some-think-so/2017/01/24/00bbdcca-e1a0-11e6-a547-5fb9411d332c\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.a1e8a6f6a936](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/was-the-womens-march-just-another-display-of-white-privilege-some-think-so/2017/01/24/00bbdcca-e1a0-11e6-a547-5fb9411d332c_story.html?utm_term=.a1e8a6f6a936))



An intersectional and historical analysis is necessary to avoid producing a monolith of resistance movements. In terms of the women's march, the intersectional work women of color focused on included the rights and visibility of trans folks and the heightened amount of state violence against black and brown bodies. For this reason, the "pink pussy" hats and appreciation of law enforcement was highly critiqued as I previously stated. Narrow definitions of feminism render these insurgencies invisible. This process of narrowing is countered by the hypervisibility and unapologetic nature of these spaces. The online communities of women of color that I examine have taken up online platforms to form community and a space for these subjugated bodies of knowledge to exist.

Blackwell understands the formation of the Chicana print culture in the 1970s as indicative of a feminist insurgency where new knowledge was being produced outside of the mainstream women's liberation movement.<sup>60</sup> In the digital age, women of color online communities have created a type of women of color online culture. In place of *Encuentro Femenil* and *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc*, both examples that Blackwell uses, there exists *Latina Rebels*, *Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero chingonas* (among others) circulating information and serving as organizing spaces. In order to make this comparison, I will briefly discuss the transformative work of *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* and *Encuentro Femenil* and situate them as valid sites of knowledge production.

*Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* was a Chicana feminist newspaper that published 3 issues in 1971. The newspaper was founded by Anna Nieto-Gomez and Adelaida Castillo, who were both part of the United Mexican American Students organization at California State University. The newspaper "marked a gendered shift in the print culture of the Chicano

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<sup>60</sup> Blackwell, *Chicana power*, p. 133.

movement and [signaled] the growth of Chicana feminist communities locally and translocally.”<sup>61</sup> *Las Hijas De Cuauhtémoc* was short-lived, but it yielded the conditions for other publications and scholarship to flourish. *Encuentro Feminil* was created shortly after and served as the first Chicana feminist journal that documented Chicana feminist theory and activism in the 70s. This type of publication relied on the activist efforts and real life experiences of Chicanas to theorize and opened up an important space for “autonomous Chicana cultural production.”<sup>62</sup> *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* and *Encuentro Feminil* were part of the Chicana print culture that operated as a counterpublic to the dominant discursive terrain of the Chicano movement.

Within the Chicano movement, limited space was available to discuss and celebrate Chicana experiences. The presence of *Las Hijas de Cuautémoc* and *Encuentro Feminil* decolonized the subject at the center of the Chicano movement. The subject was no longer the monolithic subject of the “Aztlán male”<sup>63</sup> but rather, a multitude of racialized and gendered subjects at the center of these liberation efforts. These publications illustrated an intervention, a rupture, and a delinking from the patriarchal and nationalistic tendencies the Chicano movement. They constituted a counterpublic<sup>64</sup> that rendered Chicana feminist contributions visible and intelligible. Nancy Fraser’s rendering of a counterpublic is of most importance here. Fraser describes counterpublics as, “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate operational interpretations of their identities, interests and

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<sup>61</sup> Blackwell, *Chicana power*, p. 133.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p. 146.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

needs.”<sup>65</sup> This counterpublic offered an option – an option for another way to understand the Chicano movement. It offered an option whereby the contributions and works of Chicanas in the movement weren’t just added in, but were, instead, central to the analysis of what the Chicano movement accomplished and the legacies that have been left.

Blackwell’s theorization of multiple feminist insurgencies of women of color serves as a powerful tool to understand the range of not only Latina feminist theories but also feminist theories in general. Even though she was only applying it to the Chicano movement in her particular book, the methodology and theoretical tools she used can be utilized to look at other movements and to look in between and across them. *Latina Rebels, Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas* can be conceptualized in this same vein. These three platforms operate as a Latina feminist online print culture that challenges the dominant, colonial discursive terrain.

### ***Subjugated knowledges: challenging coloniality***

The subjugation of knowledge occurs through historical processes of knowledge production. The destruction, replacement and invalidation of these types of knowledges support the process of controlling the masses. With the rise of the Internet and the World Wide Web, the process of destroying, replacing and invalidating those knowledges have become a bit more difficult. I find Foucault’s understanding of subjugated knowledges most useful here:

By ‘subjugated knowledges’ one should understand something else...namely a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task or

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<sup>65</sup> Frasier, Nancy. “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text*. no. 25(1990), p. 67.

insufficiently elaborated; naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.<sup>66</sup>

Subjugated knowledges are cultivated within marginalized and oppressed groups. Women of color, queer folks, low-income folks and immigrant communities, among others, can all develop a type of subjugated knowledge based on their multitude of experiences. However, it is important to note that hegemonic knowledges are also cultivated and supported within these groups. Members of the marginalized group can engage in hegemonic knowledge rather than the subjugated knowledge their group produces. For example, a person who identifies as a Chicana can engage in machista ideals even though the larger Chicana experience challenges machismo. Hegemonic knowledges are institutionalized and ingrained in particular ideologies and structures we operate in and with each day. Yet, as mentioned, these knowledges operate within a discourse and discourses are not all encompassing. There is room and the possibility for a different understanding.

Patricia Hill Collins argues that subjugated knowledges are produced when they fail to meet the political standards of “knowledge validation processes.”<sup>67</sup> These standards include being rational, objective, positivist, detached from emotion and widely accepted by the scholarly community. These oppressive validation procedures works deliberately to silence the types of knowledges marginalized populations curate, for the sake of maintaining political, social and cultural order. One type of subjugated knowledge that has been at the center of many contested debates is African thought. V.Y Mudimbe traces what he calls an African gnosis – that is, a particular strain of thought about Africa and African-ness. Mudimbe begins his analysis with the idea of epistemological ethnocentrism, that is,

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<sup>66</sup> Foucault, Michel, and Colin Gordon. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980)

<sup>67</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

“the belief that scientifically there is nothing to be learned from ‘them’ unless it is already ‘ours’ or comes from ‘us’.<sup>68</sup> The ‘ours’ and ‘us’ he refers to is that of Europe and the United States. Mudimbe suggests that there are two types of ethnocentrism that work in conjunction with one another to constitute the discourse of power and knowledge that he is describing. Using anthropology as a site of inquiry, Mudimbe states that there is an epistemological filiation, which gives anthropology its status and credibility as a discourse and a science, and there is an ideological connection, which deals with the intellectual and behavioral attitudes of individuals.<sup>69</sup> Mudimbe locates anthropology as a visible power-knowledge political system that acted as a normalizing mechanism to “other” its objects of study and constitutes them, as Said illustrates, as an uncivilized, savage opposition of people in the west.<sup>70</sup>

In his endeavor to cultivate an idea of African thinking or African philosophy, he concludes that “The conceptual framework of African thinking has been both a mirror and a consequence of the experience of European hegemony: that is, in Gramsci’s terms, ‘the dominance of one social bloc over another, not simply by means of force or wealth, but by social authority whose ultimate sanction and expression is profound cultural supremacy’.”<sup>71</sup> African thinking and philosophy have formed in response and against European cultural supremacy – the same way that the concept of decoloniality emerged in response and against coloniality. I find the same to be true with the subjugated knowledges being produced by *Latina Rebels*, *Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingona*. The knowledge being produced by these platforms are both a mirror and consequence of

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<sup>68</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention*, p. 15.

<sup>69</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, p. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1979)

<sup>71</sup> Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, p. 185.

European hegemony – colonization, cultural supremacy, etc. Also, the knowledge being curated here fails to meet the majority of the “knowledge validation procedures” that would otherwise render them dominant and valid.

In this chapter, I situated *Latina Rebels*, *Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas* as valid sites of knowledge production by conceptualizing them as feminist insurgencies that created a women of color online culture. These women of color online culture operates in the same way the Chicana print culture operated in the 1970s during the Chicano movement. *Las Hijas de Cuauhtémoc* and *Encuentro Femenil* created the conditions of possibility for a Latina print culture to exist. Due to social media, this women of color online culture defies spatial and temporal limits to connect women of color across the diaspora to engage in knowledge production and sharing. In the next chapter, I will be discussing the brave, important healing work that these women of color, *las curanderas*, are doing.

### Chapter 3 - *Las curanderas*: healing the wounds

Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the processes of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples.<sup>72</sup>  
 -Linda Tuhiwai Smith

You feel everything and feel nothing. You carry loads of pain for the displacement you've felt due to your need to question everything. But have had to accept living that confused and living that awake because once you've heard your chains rattle, you cannot unhear them.<sup>73</sup>  
 -Prisca Dorcas Mojica Rodriguez

I sat in the large theater known as Mandel Hall at the University of Chicago waiting for Prisca Dorcas Mojica Rodriguez, founder of *Latina Rebels*, to enter on stage. Draped behind a small stool and microphone was a large red curtain that engulfed the stage entirely. When I first arrived, the theater was not packed and I sat with my roommate off to the side. The room began to fill with people and by the time Prisca came up on stage, a significant audience was waiting for her to speak. She sat at the stool, in a white top, reflecting against the huge red drape behind her. The drape no longer seemed engulfing; instead her presence engulfed the room. I had been following the *Latina Rebels* account on Facebook and Instagram for at least two years at this point – I had always wanted to hear Prisca speak. The first thing she did was name the institution at which she was speaking – meaning, she recognized that the institution is a historically white-institution and declared the space as one intended for the brown folks in the room. She's a self-described "chonga

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<sup>72</sup> Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples – Second Edition*. (New York: Zed Books, 2012), p. 116.

<sup>73</sup> Rodriguez, Prisca Dorcas Mojica. "Dear Woke Brown Girl." *Huffington Post*, updated last February 7, 2017. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/prisca-dorcas-mojica-rodriguez/dear-woke-brown-girl\\_b\\_9209662.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/prisca-dorcas-mojica-rodriguez/dear-woke-brown-girl_b_9209662.html)

Mujerista” and is “unapologetic, angry, and uncompromising about protecting and upholding the stories of brown folks.”<sup>74</sup> I specifically came to hear her read her article, “Dear Woke Brown Girl.” This article was an inspirational piece of work in my self-understanding, my brownness and my commitment to dismantling systems of oppression. Her platform, along with two other online platforms, *Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas*, allowed for a transformation in the ways I understood myself and my place within the capitalist/colonial/imperial world system. This chapter introduces these three online platforms and attempts to examine my relationship with these spaces using specific posts, articles and memes shared by them.

*Latina Rebels* is an online community of women of color that operates on the social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram. As of March 2018, the Facebook page has 91,472 likes and its Instagram page has over 105,000 followers. The platform, which is listed as a cause on Facebook’s directory, describes its purpose as “Empowering fully present Latinidad, one Latina at a time, by disrupting the binary expectations that are placed on Latinas bodies and minds.”<sup>75</sup> This was the first platform that I started getting involved with on Facebook. One of my friends shared a post from *Latina Rebels* and I clicked the page and started perusing their posts. The material they were posting of a funny meme, political post or article resonated with me. On their Facebook page, they describe their mission, “to f\*ck with your colonized expectations of acceptability.”<sup>76</sup> Specifically, this page focuses on the colonized expectations placed upon Latinidad. As a mixed race Latina, I

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<sup>74</sup> Rodriguez, Prisca Dorcas Mojica. “About Prisca Dorcas” Accessed November 5, 2017. <http://priscadorcas.com/about/>

<sup>75</sup> “Latina Rebels” *Facebook*. Accessed November 5, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/latinarebels1/>

<sup>76</sup> Latina Rebels” *Facebook*. Accessed November 5, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/latinarebels1/>



have struggled with issues of authenticity and have felt out of place especially when I moved from Humboldt Park, a predominantly Puerto Rican neighborhood, into a predominantly white neighborhood. The logic of coloniality requires a type of authenticity of identity. Since coloniality rests upon social classifications, it's crucial to its existence that identities can be carefully categorized and boundaries can be put in place accordingly. *Latina Rebels* served as a resource to navigate this phenomenon and shed light on what expectations and scripts were being placed on my body along with serving as a news source on contemporary political issues and larger systemic issues in general.

As of March 2018, *Xicanisma* has over 103,947 followers on Facebook and over 101,000 followers on Instagram. This platform is listed as a personal blog on Facebook and describes itself as, "Dismantling oppressive isms through privileged tears."<sup>77</sup> *Xicanisma* refers to a strand of feminism known as Chicana feminism and was coined by Chicana novelist Ana Castillo.<sup>78</sup> This platform engages with issues of sexism, racism, classism, ableism, xenophobia, transphobia, and immigration issues. Their description insinuates that in their attempts to dismantle "isms" they are unapologetic and refuse to engage in respectability politics or compromise. Being unapologetic consists of not filtering language or softening criticisms so that those who are being criticized don't feel attacked. The unapologetic nature of this space coincides with a shift in attitudes among younger generations on respectability and how justice is called for. Within these spaces the term "white tears" or "privileged tears" is used to describe outrage, defensive reactions, and/or complaining by the dominant group in response to the challenging of these "isms". The

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<sup>77</sup> "Xicanisma" *Facebook*. Accessed November 5, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/xicanisma/>

<sup>78</sup> "Decolonize your mind: the roots and power of Xicanisma." *Venceremos*. Accessed November 5, 2017. <http://web.utah.edu/venceremos/Xicanisma.html>

deliberate decentering of those comments and the deliberate centering of the experiences of subordinate groups is a key focus in the content and dialogue displayed on this platform.

*Lindas, libres pero chingonas* is an online platform with almost 15,484 followers on Facebook as of March of 2018 and is listed as a community. The page describes its purpose “to feed the glittery spirits of Chingonas and dismantle hate, sexism, binaries, racism, xenophobia, self-hate with our doses of ratchet mujerista love.”<sup>79</sup> The founder of this platform works at the Logan Square Neighborhood Association in Chicago and my roommate is a contributor to the Facebook page. The Logan Square Neighborhood Association is a non-profit that operates within the Logan Square neighborhood in Chicago. The organization focuses on youth programming, equitable housing/gentrification, immigration advocacy, and education. The Facebook page states the exact issues that they confront and are trying to dismantle:

*Lindas, Libres Pero Chingonas* is a community that is intersectional, inclusive that believes in LOVING ourselves and one another while also addressing oppression based on age, race, gender, size, disability, sexual orientation, mental health status, and other human attributes. Our goal is to foster a space that opens a wider understanding and connection between us all, because we believe it is through compassionate and humane dialogue that we grow, learn, and foster radical self-love that translates to radical human love in service toward a more just and compassionate world.<sup>80</sup>

Out of all the platforms, *Lindas, libres pero chingonas* calls itself an actual community while the others are listed as a blog and a cause on Facebook’s directory.

The contributors to these platforms discuss issues such as racism, deportation, police brutality, colonized mentalities, mental health issues in communities of color, body-image issues, respectability politics, and sexual liberation. There is a constant, eclectic

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<sup>79</sup> “*Lindas, libres pero chingonas*.” *Facebook*. Accessed November 5, 2017  
[https://www.facebook.com/pg/LindaLibreChingona/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/LindaLibreChingona/about/?ref=page_internal)

<sup>80</sup> “*Ibid*.”

swarm of posts that these platforms produce on a daily basis much of which, lately, has been discussing the dangers of the Trump administration. All three platforms consistently share both original and shared information regarding any news on executive orders that threaten undocumented peoples, refugees, and other marginalized folks. The platforms also act as a space for organizing and resource sharing. I have been learning and sharing from these online pages since 2015. I see them as a resource, as a space for intellectual debate, a place where the proliferation of new ways of understanding oneself and the world around them occurs. Not only are these spaces informative, resourceful and challenging multiple “isms” at every turn, they also are a place of chisme,<sup>81</sup> sarcasm, self-love and humor. These online communities are a place of survival and action. I conceptualize these spaces as being decolonial and characterized by three things: a rejection of anti-blackness, a critique of the capitalist/colonial/imperial world system, and liberating conceptions of gender and sexuality. In order to illustrate this, I engage in a discourse analysis of a selection of posts from these particular pages. I have organized the posts under the three themes that are constitutive of these decolonial feminist virtual spaces.

### ***Rejection of anti-blackness***

*Latina Rebels* posted a photo on October 4, 2016 during Hispanic Heritage Month that states, “ My Roots, My Natural, My Negra, My Diaspora, My Blackness, My AfroLatina Matters.”<sup>82</sup> This was posted in response to the narrow views on *Latinidad* when it comes to Hispanic Heritage Month. The photo was accompanied with the following caption:

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<sup>81</sup> “Chisme as a Tool of Liberation.” *QLatinx*. Accessed November 5, 2017.

[http://www.qlatinx.org/single-post/2017/10/27/Chisme-as-a-Tool-of-Liberation](http://www qlatinx.org/single-post/2017/10/27/Chisme-as-a-Tool-of-Liberation)

<sup>82</sup> See Figure 1

“Hispanic Heritage Month centers a very specific type of Latinx and often erases & conveniently forgets about AfroLatinxs.”<sup>83</sup> Anti-blackness within Latinx communities runs far and deep.<sup>84</sup> Growing up as a child I was always told to stay out of the sun as to not become a “morenita” or “prieta”. The darker I got the less desirable I was and the less I was able to assimilate in American society. During Hispanic Heritage Month, a particular type of Latinx gets acknowledged – mainly the mestizaje, mixed race appearing Latinx gets toted around as the epicenter of Latinx identity. This prejudice within the Latinx community is not a new phenomena. With the colonization of the Americas, and the Atlantic slave trade, groups of people were socially and legally classified by “color” and a specific set of social relations emerged. There were those who were conquered and those who conquered, and “so the conquered...were situated in a natural position of inferiority and, as a result, their phenotypic traits as well as their cultural features were considered inferior.”<sup>85</sup> This type of colonial logic resonates with contemporary racial hierarchies that and even within that already lower stratum of the hierarchy, Afro-Latinx’s remains foreign.<sup>86</sup>

*Latina Rebels* shared a post on July 14, 2016 that called for folks to continue to “#staymad” and “#staywoke” regarding the alarming numbers of black folks killed by

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<sup>83</sup> Scharrón-Del Rio, Maria R, Alan A. Aja. “The Case FOR ‘Latinx’: Why Intersectionality Is Not A Choice.” *Latino Rebels*. Accessed November 5, 2017.

<http://www.latinorebels.com/2015/12/05/the-case-for-latinx-why-intersectionality-is-not-a-choice/>

<sup>84</sup> Hernández, Tanya Katerí. “Too Black To Be Latino/a: Blackness And Blacks As Foreigners In Latino Studies.” *Latino Studies* 1 no. 1 (2003): 152-159.

<sup>85</sup> Quijano, Aníbal. “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America.” *International Sociology* 15, no.2 (2000): 215-232.

<sup>86</sup> Hernández, “Too Black to be Latina/a.”

police, missing and murdered indigenous women, and other large scale fatal attacks.<sup>87</sup> It received 668 reactions and 217 shares on Facebook. The post (originally in all-CAPS) reads,

MAD ABOUT PHILANDO CASTILE/MAD ABOUT ALTON STERLING/MAD ABOUT THE ORLANDO SHOOTING/MAD ABOUT MISSING & MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN/MAD ABOUT MY ANCESTORS/MAD ABOUT SETTLER COLONIALISM/MAD ABOUT SEXISM, RACISM, ABLEISM, HOMOPHOBIA/POLICE BRUTALITY, & OTHER BARBARIC BULLSHIT.

The deliberate call to “stay mad” with this post refers to the trope of “angry black woman” that has been utilized against black woman to silence their anger at injustices.<sup>88</sup> Not only does this trope aim to silence women, it also invalidates the anger if expressed in the first place. The reclamation of raw emotions, specifically outrage, has been important to the Black Lives Matter movement and other racial justice initiatives. James Baldwin once said, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time,”<sup>89</sup> and that sentiment continues to be expressed within the content of these platforms. In addition to simple text posts like the two mentioned above, these platforms share content that scholars, authors and other activists originally have written, published or voiced.

For example, *Xicanisma* posted a screenshot of a quote by Pulitzer Prize winner Toni Morrison on their Instagram page.<sup>90</sup> The quote reads:

The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, so you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly, so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms,

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<sup>87</sup> See Figure 2

<sup>88</sup> Harris-Perry, Melissa P. *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011)

<sup>89</sup> Baldwin, James. *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*. (New York, NY: Literary Classics of the United States, 1998)

<sup>90</sup> See Figure 3

so you dredge that up. None of that is necessary. There will always be one more thing.

The creator of *Xicanisma* captioned this post with a reflection on her experience with proving her worth to racists. She sums up how she has learned to acknowledge this particular function of racism, and has decided to stop explaining oppression to others who demand an explanation. The function of distraction can include proving one own authenticity, proving oppression, and proving one own's worth. This constant process of "proving" one own's humanity leaves little energy to combat the conditions in which this proving is made necessary for survival. Toni Morrison has written multiple novels that typically focus on issues that are central to black women's multiplicity of experiences and, at times, relate it back to this idea of racism functioning as distraction.

My favorite book by Morrison is *The Bluest Eye*. It is a story of a young black girl who longs for blue eyes. The story focuses on the perils of internalized racism and the reclamation of African-American beauty. While I am not an Afro-Latina, the same themes resonated with me in terms of normalized Eurocentric beauty standards and feelings of not being beautiful enough. Dark skin, dark hair and dark eyes have not been historically celebrated.<sup>91</sup> I suggest that the same function of distraction Morrison speaks of in the quote above applies to the larger issue of internalized racism and Eurocentric beauty standards. We are forced to explain why these specific features are important and worthy. We are forced to do the heavy lifting of centering, legitimizing, and celebrating these differences. There will always be something else, though. Rather than continue to try to explain oppression as a function of distraction, we see the efforts of these sites actively focused on

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<sup>91</sup> Patton, Tracey Owens. "Hey Girl, Am I More than My Hair?: African American Women and Their Struggles with Beauty, Body Image, and Hair." *NWSA Journal* 18 no. 2 (2006): 24-51.

dismantling those forms of oppression. The next section takes a look at how a few posts critique and speak about the intersecting oppressive systems at work.

### ***Critique of the capitalist/colonial/imperial world system***

Latina Rebels posted a photo on Facebook on July 9, 2016 that reads, “You are worth so much more than your productivity. Anti-Capitalist Love Notes” that was accompanied with a small picture of a rose.<sup>92</sup> The image is accompanied by a comment by Latina Rebels stating “Productivity is predicated on capitalism & whiteness.” Productivity is understood as one of the most fundamental concepts of capitalism. The largest indicator of productivity, that is also used to rank economies, GDP (gross domestic product), “measures the level of total economic output relative to the population of a country.”<sup>93</sup> In sum, it measures how economically productive country is – how productive the people are. Salaries and wages are based upon their productivity and those who are deemed unproductive, i.e lower income communities, homeless folks, etc , are also unworthy of resources such as healthcare, education, and shelter. The creator of these notes describes the work as “letterpress printing to power the revolution”<sup>94</sup> and the notes are available for purchase on Etsy by *emprints*.

*Xicanisma* posted a photo featuring a sleeping Homer Simpson looking angry in bed with a caption that reads “When you wake up and capitalism is still the dominant economic system.”<sup>95</sup> This was posted on February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and, at the time of the screenshot, was

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<sup>92</sup> See Figure 4

<sup>93</sup> “Gross Domestic Product Per Capita” *United Nations*. Accessed November 5, 2017. [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/methodology\\_sheets/econ\\_development/gdp\\_percapita.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/methodology_sheets/econ_development/gdp_percapita.pdf)

<sup>94</sup> “Radical Emprints.” *Facebook* Accessed November 5, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/radicalemprints/>

<sup>95</sup> See Figure 5

accompanied by almost 2,000 likes and 40 comments. The administrator of the *Xicanisma* account added an additional caption that read, “At least it’s Friday.” Posts like this are typical on these social media platforms and act as a small act of resistance in terms of a critical reminder to the capitalist conditions we live under, but, in addition to that, it also provides some comic relief for followers of the account. The post speaks to the frustration of those engaging in anti-capitalist work and rhetoric but rely on the system for their livelihoods. The use of memes as resistance and humor is a relatively new phenomenon that has taken over the Internet. Memes have been used to cope with a number issues and themes including mental health, racism, education, governance and sexism. Memes can also serve the purpose of humor and fun. *Latina Rebels* posted a meme that depicts a doctor writing on a clipboard and reads, “Feeling Sad and Depressed? Are you anxious? Worried about the future? Feeling isolated and alone? You might be suffering from CAPITALISM.”<sup>96</sup> In the same vein as the previous post, this serves two purposes: engaging in a critique about the affects of capitalism and also providing comic relief on the part of the followers of the account.

*Latina Rebels* posted a photo took Donald Trump’s campaign slogan, “Make American Great Again” and altered it to create an acronym for the word “great.”<sup>97</sup> This post reads:

**G**ive Back Stolen Lands  
**R**elease All Political Prisoners  
**E**liminate Overseas Military Bases  
**A**tone For Centuries of Slavery  
**T**ake Care of the Common Good.

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<sup>96</sup> See Figure 6

<sup>97</sup> See Figure 7



The post received 508 reactions and 208 shares on Facebook. The content of this post touches on the historical pillaging of native lands, the rights of political prisoners, U.S military imperialism overseas, slavery and notions of the common good. The confiscation of the world “great” into this acronym directly challenges Donald Trump’s campaign and their idealized version of a great America. The slogan of “Make American Great Again” was adopted from President Ronald Reagan’s campaign in 1980. Yet, Ronald Reagan’s presidency has been attributed with devastating blows to marginalized communities in the United States through the “War on Drugs.”<sup>98</sup> The idea of reclaiming the country from criminals and lawless citizens is at the forefront of these campaigns and that reclamation is what will make America great again. In opposition to that, this post highlights that we need to historicize what has made America unjust and cruel and act to remedy those historical instances and processes. This post provides a different a perspective and takes into consideration the imperial and colonial history of the United States.

*Xicanisma* posted a poem written by a Nigerian poet named Ijeoma Umehinyuo.<sup>99</sup> The poem was posted on February 11, 2016 and was accompanied by 805 likes and over 1,000 shares on Facebook. The poem reads, “i lost cultures/i lost a whole language/ i lost my religion/ i lost it all in the fire/ that is colonization/ so I will not apologize/ for owning every piece of me/ they could not take, break/ and claim as theirs.” The poet discusses being unapologetically herself and owning all that was left after colonization destroyed her culture and ancestral history. When I read this poem, I immediately connected her words

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<sup>98</sup> Nunn, Kenneth B. “ Race, Crime and Pool of Surplus Criminiality: Or Why the ‘War on Drugs’ Was a ‘War on Blacks’.” *Gender, Race and Justice* (2002): 381-445.

<sup>99</sup> See Figure 8

to the words of the surrealist poem of Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*. Cesaire writes,

My turn to state an equation: colonization = "thing-ification."  
I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about "achievements," diseases cured, improved standards of living.  
I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out.<sup>100</sup>

The fire that is colonization has wiped out the extraordinary possibilities Ijeoma could have experienced – her ancestral culture, language, lineage, and history. In the name of modernity and progress, whole humans have been sacrificed and deliberately broken down to sub-human, less-human, non-human.<sup>101</sup> A specific set of binaries set in place – modern/traditional, industrialized/unindustrialized, white/black, man/woman, and subject/other – supports the domination and control of colonized peoples. In this poem, Ijeoma rejects the notion that she should apologize for owning everything that could not be taken. What could not be taken is herself – her as a whole person, a whole woman, a whole being, writing and sharing, inspiring and transforming. She refuses to be “thingified.” *Xicanisma* posted an actual poem of Ijeoma Umebinyuo on Instagram.<sup>102</sup> The poem, from *Questions for Ada*, reads,

So, here you are  
Too foreign for home  
Too foreign for here.  
Never enough for both.

Ijeoma is referring to those of us who have been discursively formed by historical processes of colonization, enslavement, and migration. For me, Ijeoma refers to us who

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<sup>100</sup> Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, pg. 42-43.

<sup>101</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*.

<sup>102</sup> See Figure 9

dwell in the borderlands - those of us who dwell in nepantla, “the place where at once we are detached (separated) and attached (connected) to each of our several cultures.”<sup>103</sup> As women of color in the United States, there is a sense of not belonging – a sense of not being American enough. The sense of this non-belonging comes from not being in the dominant group – whether it be in categories of race, gender, or sexuality. The same sentiment is felt when we return to the lands that our parents and grandparents came from. These sentiments aren’t exclusive to only of women of color – men of color may also experience this particular type of detachment. Immigrants coming from Western countries who are white or white-passing may also experience a similar sense of not belonging but they have an easier time of assimilating due to their whiteness. Women of color (those who are not white-passing), no matter how assimilated, will not benefit from that cloak of whiteness. This is not a matter of self-identification, but of a perception and classification by others. My mother is half-German, but I will never be able to claim a white identity because of my undeniably brown skin.

As a young girl, I visited Puerto Rico where members of my extended family still live. I am a second generation Puerto Rican who knows very little Spanish – at the young age of 14 I was hiding behind my grandmother scared to attempt to talk to my family members who I had not seen in years. Will they make fun of my lack of Spanish skills? Are they going to judge me for not knowing much about my small island? Ijeoma’s poem immediately resonated with me and those feelings from when I was a young girl began to make sense – I wasn’t the only one who felt that they didn’t belong neither here nor there.

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<sup>103</sup> Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz En Lo Oscuro*, p. 56.

As I have grown older and became aware of the complexity of identity, I came to the understand how I have been taught to think in a monolithic way about my identity.

### ***Liberating conceptions of sexuality and gender***

Sexuality and gender are prominent themes in the content shared by these Facebook and Instagram pages. The reclamation of one's sexuality from patriarchy, misogyny, and sexist ideals remains one of the most posted about themes in all of these platforms. In these spaces, there is the concept of "proheauxism"- a play on words to the term pro-hoe that has been conceptualized as being practiced by "Black or brown womanists—women and femme, cis or trans—who are pro-sex and/or are sex workers and support sex worker rights. Committed to collective and personal empowerment, not just sexually, but through economic security sans judgment of the means."<sup>104</sup> Proheauxism considers the racialized and gendered nature of sexuality – focusing heavily on transphobia and anti-blackness when it comes to conceptions of sexuality. Futhermore, this concept rejects body shaming, gender policing, and overall stigmatization and instead promotes sex-positivity, reproductive justice and empowerment. The proheaux movement has been taken up by folks on social media – specifically within the network of the platforms I am discussing. It is considered an intersectional sex politics and critiques the mainstream sex-positive movement that fails to support sex workers rights movements. For example, the Women's March, which was held in January of 2017, released a unity statement and later redacted the line that stated, "we stand in solidarity with sex workers' rights movements." This attempt at erasure further illustrates the lack of complexity in the sex politics of the mainstream women's movement as a whole. These platforms disengage from that rhetoric.

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<sup>104</sup> Suprihmbé. "proheauxism: a working definition\*" *Medium*. Accessed November 5, 2017 <https://medium.com/heauxhots/proheauxism-a-working-definition-c4b35c31afb4>

*Latina Rebels* posted a screenshot of a tweet on their Instagram page that stated, “Be a productive hoe. Be a smart hoe. Be a hoe who safe. Hoe well.”<sup>105</sup> The post was accompanied by almost 5,000 likes and over 100 comments from followers. The importance of safe sex, consensual sex and enjoyable sex is central to sex-positivity and reproductive justice. Being able to engage (or not engage in) in sexual relations without any fear, stigma or ramifications remains a crucial, and often dismissed, factor in liberation movements. For example, during the Chicano Movement, Chicanas held their own conference known as *La Conferencia de Mujeres Por La Raza* in Houston, Texas where they held workshops that focused on “more positive view[s] of sexuality, the eradication of patriarchal values in relation to sexuality and the double standard, a commitment to sex education, access to birth control and legal abortions, twenty-four-hour child care centers, and an end to the practice of sterilization and medical experimentation on Chicana women.”<sup>106</sup> These topics echo the core tenets of pro-heauxism and illustrate the importance of a sex-positive, justice oriented and liberating stance on sexuality and gender. In addition to that, *Xicanisma* posted on their Instagram page of a sign that says “Sex work is work!” – the post was accompanied by over 4,000 likes at the time of my screenshot.<sup>107</sup> The sex workers movement that focuses on sex worker rights and justice initiatives remains a highly contested and controversial subject in the United States and around the world. The international sex trade and sex slavery are issues that remain important to discuss and address. The sex workers movement focuses on the harrowing effects of the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work on the women in the industry.

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<sup>105</sup> See Figure 10

<sup>106</sup> Blackwell, *Chicana power*, p. 170-171.

<sup>107</sup> See Figure 11

These are just a handful of posts that illustrate the decolonial work shared across different social media platforms. The work is decolonial because the work is healing. These platforms are allowing for the healing process to begin by naming the issues that need to be addressed. Healing is non-linear and can take shape in a multitude of ways. The posts can be healing in that they provide comic relief in face of interlocking systems that continue to weigh folks down on a daily basis. The posts can be healing in reassuring others that they are not alone in their experiences and analysis of the world around them. The posts can also be healing in that they may provide actual links to donate money to or share information on offline calls to action. These online communities of women of color continue to create and share content daily so there's a continual stream of posts and thoughts that could be added to this analysis. In this chapter, I discussed how these online communities of women of color shared content that challenges anti-blackness, critiques the capitalist/colonial world system and shares positive and progressive views on sexuality and gender. This chapter analysis is a surface level glimpse at the content, work and activism occurring in these spaces.

### **Conclusion: the decolonial potential of online spaces**

The virtual presence of *Latina Rebels*, *Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas* can help us envision the decolonial potential of online spaces. By conceptualizing these three platforms as sites of knowledge production, I have set the stage for further research on the decolonial potential of social media and the ways in which folks form virtual communities across spatial and temporal lines. *Latina Rebels*, *Xicanisma* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas* represent a feminist virtual sphere that extends from online spaces to public places. They can be characterized by a deliberate rejection of anti-blackness, a critique of the colonial/imperial/capitalist world system and liberating ideas of gender and sexuality. These platforms are part of a decolonial project existing online that continues to grow and transform each day of operation. Through an analysis of three relationships – knowledge production and coloniality, knowledge production and the three platforms, and these three platforms and myself – I described the ways in which these platforms operated as sites of knowledge production whereby ontological and epistemological transformations occurred and organizing flourished. Knowledge production has been informed by discourses of colonial power and these online communities of women of color are actively seeking out discursive openings whereby new ways of understanding the self and others is made possible.

Through a systematic analysis of posts, I highlighted the ways in which these 3 platforms actively challenge knowledges informed by discourses of colonial power. Following the work of Maylei Blackwell, these online communities of women can be understood as feminist insurgencies that created an online Latina print culture challenging the coloniality of knowledge production – similar to how Chicanas created a Chicana print

culture during the Chicano movement. *Las Hijas de Cuautémoc* and *Encuentro Feminil* set the conditions of possibility for *Xicanisma*, *Latina Rebels* and *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas* to exist and flourish. With all bodies of work, there are some limitations worth mentioning.

Due to the fluid nature of these online spaces, it's almost impossible to analyze every single post, comment, and interaction that the administrators make. There may be problematic posts that don't align with the three characteristics I listed in this thesis but I have not come across any significant posts that derail from my argument. That doesn't mean those posts or comments might not exist. Furthermore, posts and comments may be deleted after their initial posting and I do not have the ability to account for any of those types of actions. The ability to delete posts and comments can problematize the spaces as sites of knowledge production. Can knowledge be simply deleted after it's shared and consumed by the masses? How does this affect our understanding of knowledge production and knowledge practices?

Additionally, the work being done in these spaces may be critiqued as slacktivism – “low-risk, low-cost activity via social media whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity.”<sup>108</sup> The term brings together slacker and activism to denote a lazy attempt at creating social change. Not only is this stance ableist (what about the folks who are confined to wheelchairs or have limited mobility?) but also it is a surface level critique that does not care to look at the significant impact of online activism in creating community across space and time. It also does not understand the importance of community in a process of healing. The work that women of

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<sup>108</sup> Rotman, D. Vieweg, S. Yardi, S. Chi, E. Preece, J. Shneiderman, B. Pirolli, P. and Glaisyer, T. From slacktivism to activism: participatory culture in the age of social media. *Ext. Abstracts CHI 2011*, ACM Press (2011)



color online communities are mainly online posts and dialogue but the groups and administrators engage in offline work as well.

Prisca Dorcas, the founder of *Latina Rebels*, recently began a speaking tour in May 2018 which includes a talk entitled, “Mental Stigmas in Latinx<sup>109</sup> Culture” where she talks about the effects of mental health stigmas and how that has shaped latinx communities. Prisca engages in a number of speaking tours throughout the year focusing on different themes and she also a contributing writer to BoldLatina, We Are Mitu, and other online media sources/magazines. Through her writing and tours, Prisca engages in important offline work that brings together communities on campuses to name, analyze, and discuss important issues while also sharing her own stories for folks to resonate with. As I’ve mentioned throughout the thesis, writing one’s self into history is understand as a critical component for healing.

The administrator of *Lindas, Libres pero Chingonas*, Juliet De Jesus Alejandre, is the Education Organizer at the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) located in Chicago. Outside of her online work, Juliet works on multiple projects within LSNA – one particular project being the *Brown in Chicago* (B.I.C) project. B.I.C focuses on recording the realities of displacement within the Logan Square, Hermosa and Avondale neighborhoods by engaging youth leaders to document their families’ migration stories from Latin America to Chicago. The participants of this project are former or current LSNA youth workers ages 16-25 and Latinx identified. The documentations, reflections and other creative work produced by the youth are featured in the annual cultural festival hosted by LSNA. For

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<sup>109</sup>Latinx is used because Latino is a masculine identifier in the Spanish language. The “x” neutralizes the word and encompasses genders outside of the man-woman binary. Pronounced “La-teen-ex.”

2018 the festival is called, “Sana, Sana Cultural Festival: Healing Historias y Mercadito,” and will be held on June 9<sup>th</sup>. This is one of the many programs/projects that Juliet creates and oversees within the organization. The online work that women of color engage in are often extensions of the offline work that they do. It’s part of the larger process of healing, a process that involves not only individuals but communities as well. For that reason, I understand the decolonial to be medicinal, remedial and restorative. I understand decoloniality in practice to be a healing practice. The online communities of women of color are addressing and naming the problems that require healing and that are what the numerous posts are doing. One way to heal involves dismantling old ways of knowing and producing new decolonial ways instead.

Furthermore, it is important to examine the knowledge being produced in these spaces to have a broader understanding of liberation movements and the role of media in creating community in an accessible manner. These three platforms are part of a larger community of folks who follow each other on social media and engage in the same work challenging the discourse on race, gender, sexuality and nation while actively trying to dismantle structures of oppression. Virtual communities online have a number of implications for the ways in which knowledge gets disseminated and validated that transcend temporal and spatial limits. I chose to look at three specific pages online, but the larger community that these groups belong to all share the knowledge each of them curates. In conjunction with the three platforms I have discussed in this thesis, the following are examples of platforms engaging in the same decolonial work:

- @QueerXicanoChisme
- @notsoivorytower

- @palantelatinx
- @unapologeticallybrownseries
- @conmijente

Via Instagram, I am able to verify that each of these accounts follow one another. This indicates that they are apart of a larger conversation. All of these accounts often share each other's posts and give credit using the hashtag "#repost" along with tagging the original creator. The process of hashtagging and tagging one another makes it easier for followers, such as myself, to be exposed to other members in this virtual community of knowledge producers and healers. Not only do these folks engage in content sharing via posts, memes and articles, some of them also created their own podcasts. Podcasts such as *Café Con Chisme*, *Locatora Radio*, *Anzalduing It*, and *Bitter Brown Femmes* discuss issues relating to discourses of race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, and imperialism/colonialism. These podcasts can be accessed from Soundcloud and/or Apple Music.

I owe much of my development as an aspiring, scholar, activist and healer to these three platforms. While my masters program gave me the tools to theorize my experience, my experiences, in and of themselves, shaped who I am today and how I want to move in the world. It's important to remember that this analysis is American-centric and the use of decolonial tools and thought are specific to location of the administrators of these pages. Decolonial praxis can look different in other parts of the world. I hope in my future research, I'll be able to look at how folks in different spaces and locations are utilizing decoloniality for their resistance online and offline. In any way, further research can be done that contours the entirety of this I network I briefly analyzed, and larger conclusions

about the work being done here can be made about the very real, tangible  
decolonial project occurring online.

## Appendix



Figure 1



Figure 2

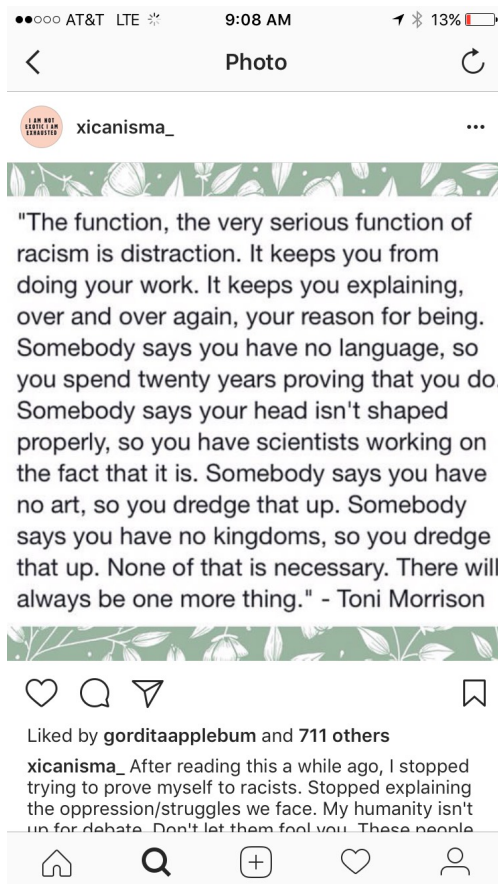


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

**MAKE AMERICA**

**G**ive Back Stolen Lands

**R**elease All Political Prisoners

**E**liminate Overseas Military Bases

**A**tone For Centuries of Slavery

**T**ake Care of the Common Good

Latina Rebels  
Page Liked · March 30 · 🌐

via @ladysoulfly

Like Comment Share

508 Top Comments

208 shares 2 Comments

Jessica Johnson Why would we limit overseas bases?  
Like · Reply · 3 · March 30 at 2:18pm  
2 Replies

Rafaella Alegre O'Phelan Eliminate the military allround deberia ser  
Like · Reply · March 31 at 7:53am

Write a comment...

Suggested Pages See All

Justice For Migrant Families  
Meghan likes this.  
Like

Figure 7

“i lost cultures  
i lost a whole language  
i lost my religion  
i lost it all in the fire  
that is colonization  
so i will not apologize  
for owning every piece of me  
they could not take, break  
and claim as theirs.”

— ljeoma Umebinyuo

Xicanisma  
Page Liked · February 11, 2016 · 🌐

Like Comment Share

Ana Enriquez and 804 others Top Comments

1,037 shares 7 Comments

Laura Trujillo I hope no root of bitterness!  
Like · Reply · February 12, 2016 at 11:37am

Evie Love Peace Powerful  
Like · Reply · February 13, 2016 at 3:19pm

View 5 more comments

Write a comment...

Suggested Pages See All

Justice For Migrant Families  
Meghan likes this.  
Like

Figure 8





Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



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