Decolonial Feminism and Global Politics: Border Thinking and Vulnerability as a knowing otherwise

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Introduction

For more than two decades, the vast production of post-structuralist/post-positivist feminist critique and postcolonial feminism thinking within the field of International Relations and more recently on Global Politics have pushed forward critical investigations on their modern and colonial foundations (e.g. Sylvester 1993, Pappart and Marchand 1995, Shilliam 2010, Gruffyd Jones 2006, etc.) In doing so, different epistemological positions have been deployed in their attempt to destabilize narratives that produce and reproduce dominant ideas about ‘the international’ and ‘global politics’. Today, these contributions constitute a fruitful background for the current wave of academic interest focused on critically understanding the epistemic foundations of IR and GP as disciplines responsible of thinking how power operates in the international and global spheres.¹

Decolonial thinking has recently been partaking in this critical endeavor (Icaza 2015 and 2010, Icaza and Vazquez 2013, Taylor 2012). Belonging to a different geo-genealogy¹ to that of post-colonial studies, decolonial thinking departs from acknowledging that there is ‘no modernity without coloniality’ (Lugonés 2010a and 2010b, Mignolo 2003 and 2013, Quijano 2000, Vazquez 2014, 2011, 2009, Walsh 2012, 2011, 2010 and 2007). For the purposes of this text, the relevance of this affirmation is that coloniality as the underside of modernity constitutes an epistemic location from which reality is thought. This locus of enunciation, following Mignolo, means that hegemonic histories of modernity as a product of the Renaissance or the Industrial Revolution are not accepted but challenged to undo their Eurocentric power projection inherent to them.² Precisely, in seeking to avoid becoming just another hegemonic project, decolonial

¹ I am using the term otherwise following Arturo Escobar 2007 seminal article “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise” in which he speaks of the modernity/coloniality program as crossing the borders of thought as “a decisive intervention into the very discursivity of the modern sciences in order to craft another space for the production of knowledge, an other way of thinking, un paradigma otro, the very possibility of talking about ‘worlds and knowledges otherwise’ (Escobar 2007: 179).

² International Relations (IR) are understood in this text as a discipline mainly concerned about the operations of power between nation-state, the nature of this power (i.e. as domination, relational, etc.), of nation-states (i.e. unified rational actor, sovereign entities, etc.) and of the system or environment in which these later operate (e.g. anarchical, cooperative, complex interdependent, etc.). Meanwhile, Global Politics (GP) is taken here as a field of analysis in its on right that contests the narrowness of state-centric approaches, (i.e. their methodological nationalism) for thinking power operations in political economic structures, institutions, actors and discourses under complex conditions of supraterritoriality or globalization.

³ Vázquez explains the relevance for decolonial critique of geo-genealogies to stress the site of enunciation. In his view, a geo-genealogy is a genealogy that acknowledges its situated origin, indicating a relationship to a geographically situated origin (Vázquez 2014: 178).

⁴ I would like to thanks Marc Woons and Sebastian Weier, the editors of this volume, for their comments on this and other arguments in the text.
thinking is also understood as an option – in contrast to a paradigm or grand theory - among a plurality of options.\(^5\)

Furthermore, from the perspective of this option ‘Western modernity’ constitutes a dominant project of civilization that claimed universality for itself at the moment of the violent encounter with ‘the Other’ and the subsequent concealment of this violence. This seminal encounter goes back to 1492 when Abya Yala (the Americas) was conquered and took place the genocide of millions of indigenous peoples, their knowledges and ways of being in the world (Mignolo 2003, Quijano 2000).

Early writings on modernity/coloniality understood it as a co-constitutive binomial and a structure of management that operates by controlling the economy, authority (government, politics); knowledge and subjectivities; gender, sexuality (Mignolo 2013, Quijano 2000). From this perspective the ‘coloniality of power’ explains that ‘the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of ‘race’ is introduced for the first time’ with the Conquest of the Americas (Lugonés 2010, 371). This analysis ‘has displayed the heterogeneous and transversal character of the modern/colonial system’ (Vazquez 2014: 176) counterpoising racial domination to Eurocentric Marxist theories of class exploitation.

More recently, it has been argued that modernity/coloniality as the binomial around which gravitates decolonial thinking has as a departure point the acknowledgment of the limits and exteriority of modernity (Vazquez 2014: 173). This is to mark a contrast with the thinking centered in the Western philosophical tradition, in which modernity in its different facets (i.e. unfinished modernity, plural and hybrid modernities, postmodernities, globalization, capitalisms, and so on) is assumed as the totality of reality. “For decolonial thinking modernity (with its modernities) cannot claim to cover all the hisotirca reality. There is an outside, something beyond modernity, because there are ways of relating to the world, ways of feeling, acting and thinking, ways of living and inhabiting the world that come from other genealogies, non-Western and non modern” (Vazquez 2014: 173).

From this perspective, to be conscious about modernity’s underside (coloniality) grants a decolonial perspective to one’s own perspective which becomes a thinking and sensing situated in the exteriority of ‘modernity’ (e.g. Dussel 2001, Vazquez 2014: 173).

Furthermore, the binomial modernity/coloniality as an epistemic position seems to question categorical separation in two main ways: of specific categories (men-women, civilized-primitive) but also of separation as a heuristic operation to represent, hence appropriate, reality. For some thinkers, this later operation constitutes a key characteristic of Eurocentrism (Lugonés 1990, Vazquez 2014). But what seems more relevant for the purposes of this text, is that modernity/coloniality expresses a duality, which is not to be conflated to a binary\(^6\) or a dialectic.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) Argentinean Cultural Historian, Zulma Palermo connects the relevance of understanding decolonial thinking as an ‘option’ to a border epistemology. See: Palermo 2008.

\(^6\) One of the key contributions of feminist anti-essentialist approaches has been that of revealing the complex and multiple operations of power in binary thinking. But, what happens when duality is thought from a different genealogy to that of feminist anti-essentialist approaches? Precisely, Gloria Anzaldúa and Maria Lugonés’ thought is crucial for an understanding of duality.
In a nutshell, modernity cannot be thought, sensed and experienced without its underside, coloniality. From this perspective, the analysis of global development (either sustainable or ‘green’) cannot be done without unpacking its ethno-centrism. In the same way, the analysis of international human rights cannot be done without the analysis of the epistemic violence of monoculturalist and imperialist understandings of justice (Icaza 2010, Walsh 2011). Therefore, to think ‘global politics’ or ‘international relations’ from this perspective carries an inseparable duality.

This duality has recently been explained as two different historical movements or forms of relationship with reality to highlight their different locus of enunciation: the historical movement of modernity as from which hegemony and privilege has named reality, for example, the name given to Abya Yala as Latin America and its peoples as “Indians” and more recently “indigenous” or “minorities”. Meanwhile, the historical movement of coloniality is a moment in which the negation of realities and worlds otherwise that exceed the dominant modern genealogy of modernity takes place, for example, when normative systems outside or in the margins of the nation-state are denied validity (Vazquez 2014, Icaza 2015).

To understand this duality in relation to time is central for the identification of a third movement: the decolonial option. In this third movement, trajectories in knowledges and cosmovisions that have been actively produced as backward or ‘sub-altern’ by hegemonic forms of understanding ‘the international’ and ‘global politics’ become politically visible (Santos et. al. 2007). This has been explored in relation to sumak kawsay (‘the good living’) and global trade politics in South America (Walsh 2011) and in relation to customary law, the monocultural perception of “human” rights and global social dissent (Icaza 2015).

Decolonial thinking has precisely introduced border thinking as an epistemological position that contributes to a shift in the forms of knowing in which the world is thought from the concrete incarnated experiences of colonial difference and the wounds left (Icaza and Vazquez 2016). Moreover, through border thinking, the violence of the dominant epistemology grounded on abstract universality as ‘a zero point’ of observation and of knowledge is seen as what disdains all other perspectives and forms of knowing (Mignolo 2010, Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006). As such, border thinking is seen as a ‘fracture of the epistemology of the zero point’ and as a possibility for a critical re-thinking of the geo and body politics of knowledge, the modern/colonial foundations of political economy analysis and of gender (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2006: 206; Grofoguel 2007; Lugonés 2010a and 2010b).

However, it is Argentinean feminist philosopher Maria Lugonés’ interpretation of Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands (Lugonés 1992) what allow us to fully consider the epistemic
contribution of a border thinking as an embodied consciousness in which dualities and vulnerability are central for a decolonization of how we think about the geo and body politics of knowledge, political economy and of course, gender in IR and GP. This will be the focus of my text.

In what follows, I am particularly interested in addressing the invitation of the editors of this volume to consider the centrality of border thinking as one that sits in an embodied consciousness to “show how the corporeal, fleshly, material existence of bodies is deeply embedded in political relations” including coloniality (Harcourt, Icaza and Vargas 2016: 150). Likewise, I am also interested in understanding what happens when in the process of that critical rethinking “the self-ascribed privileges of the West knowing subject are laid bare”. In so doing, I introduce auto-ethnographic reflection in a diological format as developed by Mexican anthropologist Xochitl Leyva (2013) who defines it as “a kind of praxis of research of co-labor (collaborative research) in which the written text is a dialogue with the spoken and written word, with visibility, with past and present experiences and with the imagined horizon of autonomy” (Barbosa et. al. 2015, Icaza 2015, Leyva 2013).

This ‘method’ is offered as an option to think the “self-ascribed” epistemic privileges of interpretation and representation of the world but also the state of vulnerability that carries to un-learn them, to refuse to accept them as the only possibilities to think/sense global and international politics. I am driven by the following questions: Is this un-learning a possibility of knowing otherwise? For whom and for what purposes?

These ideas are developed with the help of Maria Lugonés powerful interpretative analysis of Gloria Anzaldua’s Borderlands. As such this text is divided in the following sections. The first one introduces central elements in Maria Lugonés’ interpretative analysis of Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands: border subjectivity, duality and vulnerability. The following section presents three vignettes of different extension and format introducing places in the cartography of contemporary violence in Mexico: Las Patronas Veracruz, Ixtepec Oaxaca and Ayotzinapa Guerrero. The vignettes are presented as dialogical auto-ethnographic reflections in which the global politics of migration and drug-cartel related violence are thought/sense not from a zero-point of observation but from the embodied experience of the vulnerability that carries the un-learning and/or refusal to reproduce epistemic privileges of a ‘subject’ that interprets and represents reality. The final section offers some initial reflections about the questions that are opened through this text.

**Borderlands and Vulnerability in International Relations**

Elsewhere, I have argued that the work of Maria Lugonés constitutes a powerful perspective for a critical re-thinking of the global politics of resistance to neoliberalism (Icaza 2010). In particular, Lugonés’ feminist decolonial thinking contributes for a critical re-thinking of IR and GP by highlighting the dominant modern/colonial epistemology that informs these disciplines as disembodied, masculinist, placeless when producing analysis about global or transnational resistance (Icaza 2015 and 2016).

To avoid such dominant form of knowing, feminist IR thinker Christine Sylvester already insisted
in 1993 that: “We [who study IR] develop ourselves, our research skills, our capacities to see with less arrogance, by negotiating knowledge at and across experiences, theories, locations and words of insight and relationships” (Sylvester 1993: 271). Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa’s Borderlands. The New Mestiza and Maria Lugonés’ border dwelling approach to knowledge, Sylvester tells us about ‘the need to see and theorize the domestic shadow lands around us’ (1993:270).

But, what Sylvester doesn’t tell ‘us’ is what might happen to the way ‘we’ think in IR and GP if border thinking is to be understood as an embodied consciousness not just a discursive strategy to destabilize dominant narratives over ‘the international’.

Ann Fausto-Sterling work on the construction of the body offers some elements to address this question by telling us that ‘as we grow and develop, we literally not just ‘discursively’ (that is, through language and cultural practices) construct our bodies, incorporating experience into our very flesh. To understand this, we must erode the distinctions between the physical and the social body’ (2000: 20).

However, it is Maria Lugonés’ decolonial feminism grounded on African-American, Chicana and women of color feminisms who by bringing border thinking as an embodied consciousness of dualities and vulnerability brings to the fore the racialized body as an historical one produced in the colonial encounter, as the one that did not reach the standards of ‘humanity’ in order to be enslaved, raped, and exploited. In a nutshell, Lugonés thinking from an embodied experience of enslavement and racialization invite us “to think from the ground up, from the body, therefore averts the generalizations that are common to abstract modern/colonial thought” including dominant epistemologies in IR and GP (Icaza and Vazquez 2016). Moreover, this embodied thinking can also help us to understand “the limits of feminist anti-essentialist discourses that praise the performativity of identity as holding the only possibilities for desestabilization and resistance” (Icaza 2016, Icaza and Vazquez 2016). This is what I intend to develop in what follows.

The self-in-between, border subjectivities and embodied dualities

Lugonés interpretative analysis of Anzaldúa’s Borderlands departs from a critical observation regarding oppression theories as those focused on depicting the effects of oppression and ‘without intention...rul[ing] out resistance’, which appears unintelligible in the ‘logical framework’ of oppression theories’ (Lugonés 1992:32). For Lugonés, Anzaldúa’s Borderlands ‘captures both an everyday history of oppression and an everyday history of resistance...Her culture, though oppressive, also grounds her resistance’ (1992: 32). This expresses, for Lugonés, two states of the self being oppressed and resisting, hence, the self as multiple. This is an important realization that has informed my own work to re-think the one- dimensional view of the actors in social resistance that are prevalent in accounts of civil society and social movements against global capitalism in IR and IPE (Icaza 2010).

Following Anzaldúa’s notion of mestizo consciousness, Lugonés tells us that “there is the self oppressed in and by the traditional Mexican world; the self oppressed in and by the Anglo world; and the self-in-between – the Self – herself in resistance to oppression, the self in
germination in the borderlands. If the self is being oppressed, then she can feel its limits, its capacity for response, pushed in, constrained, denied. But she can also push back” (Lugonés 1992:32, my own emphasis).

Lugonés analysis of Anzaldúa’s also tells us about Coatlaloopuh, an early Mesoamerican creator goddess that embodies both a dark aspect (Coati) and a lighter side (Tonantzi). Through this, Lugonés not only brings to the forefront duality to think the social (or in our case the international and the global) but by been an embodied duality she invites us to transcend abstraction so akin to masculinist dominant thinking.

In speaking of how in Anzaldúa’s Borderlands, Coatlaloopuh becomes the chaste and desexed character of Virgin of Guadalupe by the Spanish colonizers and the Catholic Church, Lugonés focuses on an important aspect of Anzaldúa’s ideas on borders and borders subjectivities: Chicanas/mexicanas as people who cross cultures are tolerant to ambiguity out of necessity. Lugonés characterizes these subjectivities with: ‘a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity, by the transgression of rigid conceptual boundaries, and by the creative breaking of the new unitary aspects of new and old paradigms’ (Lugonés 1992:34).

Border subjectivities as rooted in a tolerance to ambiguity out of the necessity, remind us an important element of what a border epistemology – as a way of thinking – for IR and GP could entail: border thinking as a physical sensual experience of a self-in-between that is a plural self (Lugonés 1992:35). This means an emphasis on a knowing that sits in bodies and territories and its local histories in contrast to disembodied, abstract, universalist knowledge that generates global designs (Mignolo 2009 and 2010). Recognizing that knowledge is situated implies to “see the world from specific locations, embodied and particular, and never innocent” (Rose, 1997:308).

On Vulnerability, (epistemic) privileges and coalitions

Lugonés tells us that this self-in-between as a plural self ‘is captive of more than one collectivity, and her dilemma is which collectivity to listen to’ (Lugonés 1992: 35). In this listening, Lugonés identifies a deep sense of vulnerability: ‘she effects a rupture with all oppressive traditions at the same time that she makes herself vulnerable to foreign ways of thinking, relinquishing safety’ (Lugonés 1992:35, my own emphasis). A border thinking as a form of knowing otherwise is then an embodied sensual experience of vulnerability in which the safety of how one thinks know something is relinquished: our abstract universals, our detached and disembodied ways of knowing the international, our assumptions of objectivity to generate ‘right’ science, and so on.\(^\text{10}\)

Lugonés interest on the possibility of coalitional forms of resistance notes that Anzaldúa’s interest in ‘describing states in the psychology of oppression and liberation’ lead her to

\(^{10}\) Here I try to emphasize that to relinquish safety is an act of resistance to oppression. In that sense, it is a liberatory act of those selves and coalitions that delink from the confines of intelligibility, of what we are told or allowed to think/sense. As such, this liberatory act is not only a possibility or a choice for just some ‘oppressed/colonized’ people, but a potential to create coalitions with those who also delink from different epistemological privileges.
emphasize crossing-over as ‘a solitary act, an act of solitary rebellion...[hence] she does not reveal the sociality of resistance’ (Lugonés 1992:36, my own emphasis).

The sociality of resistance is central in Lugonés’ view in her interpretation of Anzaldúa’s Borderlands and in her latest work (Lugonés 2003, 2010a and 2010b) to the extent that she emphasizes in relation to a multiple self that resists and germinates in the borderlands the following: ‘unless resistance is a social activity, the resister is doomed to failure in the creation of a new universe of meaning, a new identity...’ (Lugonés 1992:36).

In this way, Lugonés offers coalitions and coalitional selves as a necessary step out of that state of isolated vulnerability in which the border dweller finds herself: ‘If rebellion and creation are understood as processes rather than as acts, then each act of solitary rebellion and creation is anchored in and responsive to a collective, even if disorganized, process of resistance’ (Lugonés 1992: 36). The survival of the Spanish language among Chicanos/mexicanos is an example that Lugonés brings from Anzaldúa to emphasize the sociality of resistance. The over 5000 years of struggle of original peoples in the Americas would be another example of this sociality.

This sociality of resistance is central in Lugonés as she remind us that ‘this society places border dwellers in profound isolation. The barriers to creative collectivity and collective creation appear insurmountable. But that is only if we think of the act and of the process of creation’ (Lugonés 1992: 36). To the isolation of border thinking as a form of embodied consciousness in which resistance sits, Lugonés counterpoises coalitions to ‘breaking down our isolation against the odds prescribed by ‘the confines of the normal’. (Lugonés 1992: 37).

**Three vignettes in the cartography of contemporary violence in Mexico**

*Las Patronas, Veracruz, Mexico*

For almost two decades, in the town of La Patronas, Veracruz, Mexico a group of women have organized to help immigrants, mostly from Central America, crossing their town during their travel to the US. The story of these women that today are called “Las Patronas” (female Patrons) began in “February 1995 when two sisters, Bernarda Romero and Rosa Romero, were standing with their groceries at a train crossing in the village, waiting for the train to pass. Migrants on the first train car began shouting, “Madre, I’m hungry”. Since that day, sisters Romero joined by a dozen of volunteer women and children from the town and from other towns and countries have cooked hundreds of daily portions of food that they packed in plastic bags, adding refilled water bottles to hand them to the immigrants while the train is in motion.

In international media outlets and academic analyses Las Patronas’ actions have been framed as a form of ‘motherly’ solidarity and as an example of an ethics of care (Buzzone 2010). What is

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17 For more information about the short film about this story visit: http://www.eltrendelasmoscas.com/

common in this sort of analyses is their emphasis on understanding right what Las Patronas are or represent in the geopolitics of migration and diaspora. It seems to be about how ‘a knowing subject’ - the academic, the activist, the media correspondent - explains them.

“I have not stopped thinking about Las Patronas. I hope to never lose the steady thumping of the rushing freight train that I still feel each time my heartbeats. As I move about my days, slight motion sickness disturbs the remnants of nausea that I felt in in the heat of the glaring sun. I know the nausea I felt that day was not just a physical response to the heat (Veracruz is a state with average highs in the 90s during the month of May) but an emotional torrent pushing and pulling and grasping at my gut – still stirring in the pit of my stomach” (Price 2013: 13).

The words above are from Cassandra Price who describes her physical state in her encounter with Las Patronas. In her text, which is featured on the Global Perspective section of Loyola University’ Women and Gender Studies Journal, Price tell us of the high risks that migrants from Central America face in their way to the US: from accidents while riding la Bestia or the Death Train to human traffickers and corrupt authorities. However, her account about migrants’ vulnerability turns into a reflection of her own physical vulnerability when confronted with the extenuating work of delivering food to migrants hanging from the fast train in movement as Las Patronas do:

“I had reached my limit. I walked dizzily back to the bus to sit down out of the sun...I felt my condition worsening. I could hear the group sharing a beautiful meal, filled with laughter and true gratefulness. I couldn’t eat...since the moment the train had passed I felt my entire body inside out begin to boil. I closed my eyes and began thinking about the way dehydration can make a person delirious. I imagined the heat of the metal... I thought of what it must take to drive a person to leave behind everything and everyone they know and love. I thought of how many people are forced to take such risks in hope of a better future for their families. I thought of my family, my friends and how I would likely never have to make such a journey. I breath in and out slowly to the beat of the freight car still thumping in my head” (Price 2013: 15).

The words above aim to display what would happen if/when the experience of Las Patronas becomes the starting point from where a ‘knowing subject’ is questioned in his/her self-ascribed privileges, for example, about her objectivity and abstract universals from which Mexican women like Las Patronas are ‘studied’. The words of feminist Cassandra Price in her encounter with Las Patronas provide some elements to start addressing how this process of questioning ‘construct our bodies, incorporating experience into our very flesh’ too (Sterling 2000:20).

Fieldwork Diary Notes on the Going Global Program

“August 7th 2013, visit to the Migrant Shelter “Hermanos del Camino”

Today, we visited the shelter for migrants “Hermanos del Camino” (Brothers in the Road) in the city of Ixtpec in the Southern state of Oaxaca, in Mexico. We had arrived the night before to Juchitan where we spent the night.

The Dutch Ministry of Foreing Affairs financed this program through the SBOS grant. See: www.goingglobal.nl
As our visit to the shelter was previously organized, the volunteer staff warmly welcomed us. The residents of the shelter, mostly young men greeted us reluctantly and with curiosity. After five minutes of awkward silence, the main coordinator of the shelter, Catholic Priest Alejandro Solalinde Guerra, appeared to welcome us. He told us that the shelter was founded in 2007 and explains that they provide temporary humanitarian aid, which includes food, shelter, medical, psychological, and legal help to migrants from Central America.15 We are told the residents of the shelter stay an average of 3 days. A female volunteer indicated that in 2012 they received a total of 11,000 persons, and by June 2013 they had supported a total of 7,100 from which 90% are men from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Solalinde continued to explain that the place is run with the help of Mexican and international volunteers. Then, he showed us a big map in the wall of the shelter’s small clinic: ‘Look, most of our brothers enter through Guatemala walking around 275 kilometers to the city of Arriaga in Chiapas where they get into the train. After 10 to 12 hours they arrive to Ixtepec, Oaxaca. 700kms later they will arrive to Lecheria in Mexico City. From there have to travel around 2,800 kms hanging in the train to reach Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez or Matamoros which are the main entry points to the US in the border with Mexico’.

I perceived a deep silence after Solalinde finished his explanation. Few seconds later, the silence was broken by the female volunteer’s invitation to visit the shelter’s facilities. During the visit, we found a very young single mother from Nicaragua and her 2 years old daughter. They were on their way to the US too. The mother told me that she had to stop in the shelter because her daughter became ill. While I translated this to the students, I noted that some of them were holding hands. Is this an act of physical comfort to each other? I was wondering that when Solalinde invited us to sit down and hold a conversation with the residents of the shelter.

All the residents are called and we formed a circle. Each of them told his/her name and nationality. We did the same. I volunteered to do the translation from Spanish into English. One of the students asked why they left their families and countries. Poverty, unemployment, violence, gangs, no future; were their answers.

After one hour, the jokes broke out. One Cuban asked me to translate: “Tell them that I might not want to go anymore to the US, I think that I will want to go to the Netherlands”. Everybody laughs until one of the students asked what they could do to help them. Solalinde’s reply was straightforward: “We don’t need your help here, we need your help back in Europe. You need to help migrants there”. Another man replied too: ‘go back home and tell your friends and family what you have been able to see here’. Total silence again.

Once more the silence was broken by a warm invitation to have a meal together with all the residents of the shelter who actually had cooked the food to share with us.

On our way to the small dinning room, one of our young female students collapsed. She is crying, shaking, sweating. As the only female member of the teaching team, I volunteered to take her back to the rental vehicle and to stay with her. On our way to the vehicle I thought of the food and conversations I was about to miss.

Once in the car, she couldn’t stop crying. Her whole body was shaking; her pale skin had become bright red. I offered her some water, she drinks some and starts to talk to me about her family and friends back home in the Netherlands. She couldn’t stop talking to me. I simply listen and think on how important seems to her to tell me about her loved ones and how important they

15 http://www.hermanosenelcamino.org/english.html
are to her. She felt sleep. I thought in silence that all is ok now and that she suffered the effects of the harsh heat. One hour later, the group came back. She woke up and everybody comforted her. We continued our journey to Chiapas.

Ten days later, during our final group session in Mexico, this student shared with all of us the following: ‘I don’t know where to start, but I always knew there were many harsh questions to ask myself, and it is only when I came here that I realized how much I needed to ask them’. While listening to this, I cannot stop asking myself if we have just witnessed a self in germination out of a conscious realization of her own vulnerability? Is this a form of knowing otherwise?”

The above-shared words are the notes gathered during my participation as one of the coordinators of the Dutch program of education on global citizenship in higher education “Going Glocal”. In Mexico, this program included a field trip that brought student of the University College Roosevelt in the Netherlands to meet with social activists and their communities in two prominent Mexican indigenous regions: Oaxaca and Chiapas (Vazquez 2015: 92)

In reporting about the experience, the main coordinator of the program in Mexico reflects that ‘the geographical trip did not guarantee that the participants would be able to travel beyond their world of meaning, beyond their position of consumers of the world, or beyond the ‘selfie tourist’ position’ (Vazquez 2015: 95). Therefore, the trip was designed and implemented as intercultural encounter between university students with the concrete struggles of Oaxaca and Chiapas indigenous communities and of Central American migrants on their way to the US.

At its core, the program was grounded on a decolonial framework and the deployment of pedagogies of positionality and world traveling. The former understood as promoting critical self-reflectivity in the students as members of the consumer society regarding their privileges (socio-economic and epistemic) as built upon the destitution of ‘others’. The later understood as providing students with a) critical awareness on their own location as a historically situated site of enunciation, but also with b) the option of ‘relating to the world’ as a place of different words of meaning, instead of a place that is there to be consumed (Vazquez 2015).

**Eurocaravana 43: thinking through the vulnerability of a sick body**

On September 26th 2014, the town of Ayotzinapa in the State of Guerrero, Mexico made it to world news headlines when 42 male students at the Raúl Isidro Burgos Rural School, some of them minors and indigenous, were kidnapped and according to Mexico’s attorney general’s office, killed and burned by members of the drug cartel Guerreros Unidos.

After some few hours of these tragic events, the hashtag #todososayotzinapa (we are all ayotzinapa) and #ayotzinapaaccionglobal (ayotzinapa global action) became trending twits in Mexico. Few days after, massive street demonstrations, performances and flash mobs were organized in different Mexican cities and across the US, Europe and Asia, etc. Meanwhile in Europe, local human rights organizations start to organize social media campaigns to raise awareness on the events (Icaza 2016). Between 17 April and 19 May 2015, the Eurocaravana 43

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16 Final Session: San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas 15th August 2013
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as an international awareness rising tour of Ayotzinapa students’ representatives and their families visited 18 cities and 14 European countries.\footnote{https://www.facebook.com/Caravana43 y #Eurocaravana43.}

In the organizing process of the Eurocaravana 43, young Mexican activists resident in the Netherlands expressed to me their concerns on the role that academics might wanted to play in the planed events: “we think that the Ayotzinapa students’ representatives and families need to play a central role, not the academics nor their institutions. We don’t want that the relatives or their terrible and painful experience to be taken by academics as something to be analyzed, as an object of study”.\footnote{Interview with representatives of Eurocaravana 43.} Likewise other conversations hold with activists, these words expressed in a daring and clear way the dominant ways of working in IR and GP in which people’s experiences of violence become an ‘object’ that is studied, but not from which one theorizes and re-learns about the world (Barbosa, Icaza y Ocampo 2015; Icaza 2015; Icaza and Vazquez 2013). But, then how can one actually do that un-learning and re-learning?

In the Netherlands, the Eurocaravana 43 visited the city of Leiden on May 16 and Amsterdam the day after. As a feminist IR academic of Mexican background, I was invited to participate in the different academic-activist events organized to raise awareness in the Netherlands on the tragic events of September 2014 in Ayotzinapa. I had to follow the events from my bed in twitter and facebook and the academic conferences through livestream.\footnote{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9kRtzTe9fA} An unexpected complication of undergoing cancer treatment didn’t allow me and my sick body to do more.

Likewise feminist Yoanna Hedva\footnote{http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory} who develops her ‘sick women theory’ to reflect on the modes of protest that are afforded to sick people, my participation was reduced to limit forms of distant solidarity: “I listened to the sounds of the marches as they drifted up to my window. Attached to the bed, I rose up my sick woman fist, in solidarity” (Hevda 2015).\footnote{http://www.maskmagazine.com/not-again/struggle/sick-woman-theory}

But in contrast to Hevda (2015), the sense of vulnerability that sickness brought with it was an opportunity to re-think and further questioning the always-capable-healthy-fit-mobile-body of an academic doing research in contemporary academia on social resistance (Icaza 2015). In other words, not to be physically able to participate in the planned events of the Eurocaravana 43, brought with it a deep sense of understanding, an embodied one, of the vulnerability of the body and of feminists analyses denouncing the epistemic violence of academic writing that stems from nowhere and is bodiless (Adichie 2009, Escobar y Harcourt 2005, Haraway 1988, Lugonés 2003). It is from that placeless/bodiless position from which the histories of certain bodies as the ‘normal’ ones (the head of state, the male financial broker), of certain places (Washington D.C, Brussels, Paris) and of certain events and memories (Charlie Hebdo killings) are universalized and reproduced as ‘common’ sense from which ‘we’ think in the international and the global (Icaza 2015).

Three vignettes, some common questions
The vignettes above were introduced as a possible way to present moments of vulnerability of the ‘knowing subject’ from which a knowing otherwise is in germination. But, which are the elements of that knowing? And in which ways border thinking as an *embodied consciousness* is central for a critical re-thinking of how we think/sense about the international and the global? In this final section, I present some initial elements to address these two questions.

First of all, it is central to understand that one of the crucial limitations of the dominant epistemology in IR and GP is grounded on a one dimensional self: the one able to observe, scrutinize, analyzed the international, including other selves and their places and communities who are there to be observed, scrutinized and analyzed.

Second, the self in germination is not only an invitation to re-think that supposedly ‘unitary observant self’ but also his gaze over other selves and to consider the creative force that inhabiting the borderlands entails. In other words, it is an invitation to consider what kind of selves germinate in the borderlands and what this germination tells us about a supposedly unitary/homogenous selves observing ‘the international’ reality. In this text, through the vignettes, I am trying to display the power that this gaze has had over the analysis of the international and the generation of knowledge, or what Mignolo calls the geo and body politics of knowledge.

Third, border subjectivities are central for a critical re-thinking of IR and GP dominant epistemologies not just as a discursive source to destabilize binary thinking, but as embodied epistemic sites of enunciation in its own right. By this latter I mean that in this embodied episteme, duality is an invitation to think selves and the reality of ‘the international’ these multiple selves inhabit, as not only in dialectical binaries so present in IR and GP analyses or as if these were abstract intellectual constructions. Moreover, it is an invitation to seriously think about oneself implication in the global dynamics of migration and diaspora as interconnected to the exploitation of resources and people’s lives.

As such, the vignettes aims to transmit the vulnerability, even physical vulnerability, as one’s way of thinking about ‘reality’ to countering placeless, abstract, bodiless IR and GP dominant epistemologies foundations. This is the kind of gnosia that aims to be stressed in each vignette, of a vulnerable ‘knowing subject’ as a detached, objective observer. The main purpose in emphasizing this is in line with Snyman who argues for the decolonial challenge of thinking *otherwise* from a position of privilege as requiring a hermeneutic of vulnerability “of the self as a perpetrating agent and of those who still bear the brunt of the aftermath of” coloniality (2015:269).

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