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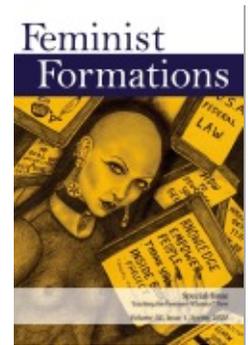
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Students in the Classroom with *Making Face, Making Soul/ Haciendo Caras* 30 Years Later

Nicole Guidotti-Hernandez

The political breadth of *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras* points to a much larger vision of subject formation in relationship to white feminisms and the inherent racism the field has yet to grapple with. *Haciendo Caras* frontloads gendered and sexualized forms of racism and ableism as the key elements dividing women within feminist movements. As teaching the anthology demonstrates, contemporary discomfort with racism requires that we take a stance against it, especially for millennial learners. As a pedagogical reflection, this generation of students is not only interested in white women's racism within feminism, but internalized racism within communities of color as well.

Keywords: Anzaldúa / Internalized Racism / Pedagogy / Racism / Women of Color Feminisms

"Professor, I really liked the introduction by Anzaldúa. I really liked her use of the idea of faces and bilingualism. What year was this published?" "1990," I replied. "Wow, everything about the essay feels like what is happening to women of color right now." This is one of the exchanges I had with a student in the fall of 2018 upon teaching Anzaldúa's edited collection, *Making Face, Making, Soul / Haciendo Caras* (1990). I have been regularly teaching Women of Color Feminisms in the United States for the last fifteen years. Each year, I tinker with the syllabus, incorporating new directions in the field, particularly in the areas of queer and trans studies. But before I launch into the contemporary, I have students read and engage with the canon. For students, going back to transnational women of color feminists who have been on the scene since the 1890s,

including women Garveyites, Borderlands feminists such as Jovita Idar, or Luisa Capetillo from Puerto Rico or Dominican feminists like Minerva Bernadino who published in newspapers, is a mind-blowing experience.¹ It is only recently that this work has been recovered as part of larger feminist genealogies. Then we read a series of essays about the category itself, “Women of Color,” and engage in a sustained and critical exploration of the limits and promises of this category of analysis within feminism. Minoo Moallem’s “Women of Color in the U.S.: Pedagogical Reflections on the Politics of ‘the Name’” (2002), Sandra Soto’s “Where in the Transnational World Are U.S. Women of Color?” (2005), Tessie Liu’s “Teaching the Differences among Women from a Historical Perspective: Rethinking Race and Gender as Social Categories” (1991), and Rachel Lee’s “Notes from the (Non)Field: Teaching and Theorizing Women of Color” (2000) set the tone for thinking about why we have historically needed this category of analysis within feminist studies. Despite being an upper-division undergraduate class, student levels of knowledge about feminism are all over the map. For most, Women of Color feminist courses, like the essays I cited above, are often ghettoized within Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies departments, and sometimes are the only class students will take that emphasizes the role of race, gender, and sexuality within a transnational context.

The student who asked me the question about Anzaldúa’s introduction to *Haciendo Caras* is Latinx and gender nonbinary from South Texas. Their² question about date of publication indicates that there are some very resonant and unresolved issues within feminist and gender studies that women of color posed in the 1980s and 1990s that students still experience in their daily lives. They may have more sophisticated modes of identifying themselves (Latinx gender nonbinary), or even argue that we live in a postracial society, but the idea of “making face” is the same. They grasped for Anzaldúa’s concept like it was life-saving. I had the student read this passage aloud to reinforce the idea that the power of narration and interpretation lies with the students themselves: “‘Making faces’ is my metaphor for constructing one’s identity. [U]sted es el modeador de su carne tanto como el de su alma. You are the shaper of your flesh as well as of your soul” (Anzaldúa 1990, xvi). As they read, the student’s face moved from disgust, to horror, and finally to relief when they realized the historic levels of inequality women of color have experienced within and outside of the feminist movement. They felt it a safe enough space to read the passage aloud that most personally resonated with them. For to be the shaper of one’s flesh and one’s experience, the idea of embodied theorization became the revolutionary foundation for how we approached Women of Color feminisms throughout the semester.

I tell this story because it is pedagogical proof that while *Borderlands / La Frontera* has been the quintessential canonical Anzaldúan text, the political breadth of *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras* points us to a much larger vision of subject formation in relationship to white feminisms and the

inherent racism the field has yet to grapple with. *Haciendo Caras* does what, as Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (2005, 24) have pointed out, is a key element of the field: “explor[ing] complex factors shaping the construction of identity, community, and nation-state while analyzing the history of women/gender, feminisms and women’s studies as they interact with other systems of power, social movements, and fields of study respectively.” By frontloading gendered and sexualized forms of racism as the key elements dividing women within feminist movements, Anzaldúa (1990, xix) pushes all of us to “make[] others ‘uncomfortable’ in their Racism, [which] is one way of ‘encouraging’ them to take a stance against it.” This generation of students is not only interested in white women’s racism within feminism, but internalized racism within communities of color. Despite the post-racialism and optimism they might have experienced during the Obama era, the Trump era has made them acutely aware of racism tied to their embodiment, and as a result, they feel like they are back to the multiple intersecting oppressions that women of color wrote about the issue in the 1980s and 1990s. Because of the heightened contemporary context of racialized rage towards Latinx, Arabs, and African Americans on a global scale, Anzaldúa’s introduction and the selected essays and poems demonstrate how complex forms of racism, within and outside of our overlapping communities, “call attention to the dynamic of avoidance among us, of not acknowledging each other—an act of dehumanizing people like ourselves” (1990, xix). In this way, the anthology names the blind spots of other canonical feminist texts while extending beyond a US context to push for an iteration of transnational feminisms that was way ahead of its time. And as the classical form of feminist pedagogy (an anthology), it demonstrates to students that a collaborative, multivocal effort is far more representative and complex than a single-authored monograph.

Transnational Feminist Critiques of Racism in Translocal Contexts

The very organization of *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras* defies early segmentation of classic feminist texts where women of color feminisms are often cordoned off by ethnic group. The textual organization is complex, juxtapositional, and relational throughout. When teaching essays and poems to undergraduates with a relational (e.g., we cannot study African American feminisms without acknowledging the relationship to American Indian feminisms) framework, we build upon each piece as a form of theorizing. I ask students to come to class with preselected passages for them to read aloud. With poems, we take turns reading the stanzas so that we can settle in on and grasp the full weight of the language. My goal is to get them to hang on every word, not skip over the content. While contemporary students are not trained to read poetic form as feminist theorizing, I use the opportunity with the anthology to teach them formalism within feminism. For example, Janice Gould’s poem

“We Exist” is an angry, reflective twenty-four-stanza piece that writes against the erasure of Native peoples. Raising a series of hemispheric concerns about Indigeneity, Gould (Anzaldúa 1990, 8) moves between Wounded Knee and the ways in which centuries of colonization and settler colonialism have created an absent mother: “My mother is not here. / They mined her / for her grief, / they followed each vein, / invading every space, / removing, they said, the last / vestige of pain.” With the double evocation of mother and violence (mother earth and the mothers of Indigenous women), Gould’s focus on disappearance and structural damages done to Native families and resources, is gendered female. By focusing on the fractured form of the stanzas with the students and close reading aloud (a skill that has to be cultivated in millennial learners who skim-read everything), extractive capitalism and settler colonialism are paired with gender violence against female bodies (earth and women). As students who may never have knowingly encountered Indigenous peoples in their lives or who are too ashamed to admit they are Indigenous,³ Gould’s insistence on survivance, to use Gerald Vizenor’s (2008) evocative word, places Native peoples squarely within Hemispheric poetic traditions and paradigms of feminist reclamations of racial histories that often get overshadowed because Indigenous peoples are not a majority-minority group. Moreover, this is not Anzaldúa’s mestiza form of indigeneity that draws on Chicano nationalism.⁴ Instead, this is a native perspective that speaks to genocide against American Indians. By opening up the space to discuss our own complicity in the silencing of genocide as a mode of feminist practice, Gould’s poem gets marginalized students to understand just how historic violence and erasure are for particular women of color.

The students liked moving from a conversation about existence, presence, and absence in poetic form to the same themes in the traditional critical essay within the Anzaldúa edited *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras*. By teaching “The Costs of Exclusionary Practices in Women’s Studies” by Baca Zinn et al. (1990), students are exposed to the pioneering work of Black and Latina leaders within the National Association of Women’s Studies who challenged their peers to rethink the white-dominant nature of publishing in the field. This essay has every reader question his/her/their racist assumptions and the blind spots of feminist optimism. In particular, students use the essay as a springboard to discuss their own place at predominantly white institutions of higher education. Students, like the authors, come to “realize[] that the experiences of these groups of women were virtually excluded from consideration as vital building blocks in feminist theory” (Baca Zinn et al. 1990, 29). Institutionalized forms of exclusion and silencing, whether they exist as a gender nonbinary Latinx student in a STEM field, a Black Brazilian exchange student whose first language is Portuguese, a bisexual cis gendered white women majoring in political science, or a tenured academic whose essay was rejected by *The Journal of Women’s History* for not being engaged enough with canonical narratives have one thing in common: if your topic or experience is not valued,

then the knowledge you bring to the table is viewed as ancillary and minor. All the students preface their comments by articulating stand-point—they share a commitment to acknowledging, analyzing, and drawing on power-knowledge relationships, to bring about change in their classroom experience. We discuss this point thoroughly because, as the authors point out, even for established scholars, “women of color and women from working-class backgrounds have few opportunities to become part of the networks that produce or monitor knowledge in women’s studies” (Baca-Zinn et al. 1990, 31).

Because the student enrollment in this class was rather diverse (five Black students, six white students, two Southeast Asian students, and seven Latinx students), they made a commitment to each other in ceding over space to peers who did not talk as much. In this way, students shared the space of networking (the classroom) as they debated what constitutes valid knowledge within Women’s and Gender Studies. When we examined the data for the history of journals like *Feminist Studies* in the 1980s as the authors did or look at contemporary syllabi for Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies, we find that white women still maintain the majority of editorial positions and faculty positions in Women’s and Gender Studies departments (Baca-Zinn et al. 1990, 31). Pedagogically speaking, this makes teaching an essay like Baca-Zinn et al. (1990) all the more historically relevant because students want to know why the majority of the canonical theory they read in their WGS classes is by white women and why concerted efforts to discuss Women of Color within majors are often relegated to particular courses (Moallem 2002). While students are appreciative of having a Woman of Color like myself teaching them how to interpret intersectionality or the exclusion of voices like theirs in the academy, they still “make faces” and recoil from the hard fact that they are underrepresented in the WGS classroom, curriculum, the publishing sphere nationwide, and academia more broadly. They also use the essay to push the conversation about anti-Blackness within Latinx feminist contexts because of the essay’s multicultural authorship. Because of their exclusion, this generation of students readily embraces conversations about (internalized) racism, especially through digital mediums, which is why they want to analyze and propose “structural efforts to combat the racism and classism so prevalent in our society” (39). Given that this particular essay is so staunchly antiracist, it ensures that historic biases in the classroom are thwarted and pushes students to reflect on the ways that they too engage in classroom power relations.

In raising consciousness about historic exclusions of Women of Color from the academy and Women’s and Gender Studies publication venues, *Making Face, Making Soul / Haciendo Caras* (1990) anticipates the emergence of a field within a field before it happened: disability studies. Sucheng Chan’s essay, “You’re Short, Besides!” (Anzaldúa 1990) brilliantly asserts that theories of normative embodiment and race go hand and hand. While she uses the terms “physically handicapped Asian American woman” to describe her subject-position, this

was the best language available to demarcate an invisibilized intersectional existence. Attacking the binary of impairment versus social construct, the field of disability studies does not emerge until 1999. Chan's essay poetically explains the cultural accounts of her disability, suggesting that "there is a strong folk belief that a person's physical state in this life is a reflection of how morally or sinfully he or she lived in previous lives" (1990, 162). This is a pivotal teaching moment in the text, for it forces students to separate themselves from their US-centric subject-positions of dismissing non-Western folk beliefs as "backwards." Instead, I get them to focus on non-Western accounts for the why of nonnormative physical embodiment and the ways in which gender and notions of value intersect. As Chan's family migrates from mainland China to Hong Kong and Malaysia, she learns to swim. She writes, "On land I was a cripple; in the ocean I could move with the grace of a fish" (163). In this way, context, mobility, ability, and racism collude in overlapping systems of oppression. One student noted that it is only when Chan is in the water can she escape the racialized, gendered, and ability-centered senses of embodiment. The student also noted that it was through Chan's multiple migrations (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and the United States) that she becomes a woman of color. Chen essentially comes to consciousness as a disabled Asian American woman. Chan also speaks openly about sexuality, which is important for students to encounter because she puts an emphasis on "American culture [which] places so much emphasis on physical attractiveness, a person with a shriveled limb, or a tilt to the head, or the inability to speak clearly, experiences great uncertainty—indeed trauma—when interacting with someone to whom he or she is attracted" (167). Chan critiques the idea of Asian American women as inherently sexualized by explaining how the stigma of disability is traumatizing in the context of starting sexual relationships. In debunking a predominant heteronormative idea of sex and what is considered natural, she reclaims a sexuality that is at once conditioned by colonialism (Asian American women as hypersexual) and disability (labeled as asexual).⁵

From the question of mobility and embodiment also emerges a conversation about "playfulness, 'world'-traveling and loving perception." In María Lugones's now canonical essay, she discusses world-making as a feminist act of traveling across worlds to propose a radical form of "cross-racial loving" (Anzaldúa 1990, 390). Pedagogically speaking, this is a difficult essay for students to grasp because Lugones draws on philosophical concepts with which most are unfamiliar. In locating the problem within the in/capacity to love, Lugones states that this is a result of "a failure to identify" (394). As students grasp the concept of identification, they know that "the possibilities for play are for the being one is in that 'world'" (401). In other words, playful explorations of self and the capacity to build worlds or see through the worldviews of others exemplify a radical feminist practice. The unexpected and surprising dimensions of this theory allows students to muse about the potentiality of not just who they are in the

world but how they are in the world. They are pleasantly surprised to discover “play” as a form of feminist practice, especially because so much social media interaction mediates self-representations that engage in “playfulness.” Predicated on the idea that everyone embodies some kind of difference, students come to value the philosophical reflections about “playful being” as a form of feminist of color, critically self-reflexive practices of love (including for one’s self).

Conclusion: Faces Made

Anzaldúa wrote, “Theorists-of-color are in the process of trying to formulate ‘marginal’ theories that are partially outside and partially inside of the Western frame of reference (if that is possible), theories that overlap many ‘worlds’” (1990, xxvi). Here, she conjoins Lugones’s theory of world-making with the marginal articulated by Gould’s poem, Baca Zinn et al., and Chan’s essays. As we analyzed these essays and poems within the class, I asked students to focus on how the material made them feel, how it intersected with their experiences and encouraged inclusion while rejecting oppression. The collective work of the anthology builds the study of women of color as a relational enterprise. In teaching *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, my objective is to narrate the historic origins of women of color feminist critique and to suggest that despite progress narratives, not much has changed. The metaphor of giving face or making faces, as visceral responses to feeling queer and outside of the discipline, to use Ochoa, Thompkins, and Holland’s words (2014), demonstrates the transhistorical and translocal impact of Anzaldúa’s anthology almost thirty years later. During the Trump era, students also have seen the pendulum shift and they identify with the text far more readily. There is a kind of forced accountability about racism within women’s and gender studies as a result of teaching this text—students feel compelled to take responsibility for the fact that they need to carefully engage with the experiences of women of color in context. As they mull over the visceral feelings that emerge from reading this text and discussing it aloud, they build communal spaces where every voice can shape a very complicated critically self-reflexive conversation. And, this is what a canonical text should do—it should stand the test of time by valuing the cacophony, not just by being the dominant voice.

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Notes

1. For more on these early transnational feminists of color, see González 2018, Capetillo 2008, Leeds 2013, and Candelario, Mayes, and Manley 2018.

2. To respect the gender non-binary aspect of this student's self-conceptualization, I use the pronoun "they" throughout the essay to refer to them.

3. Because of the racism within Latinx communities and the ways in which Indigenous peoples from Georgia and Indian territory were slave-holders from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, a number of students of color who may not be parts of federally recognized tribes often have trouble expressing their Indigenous heritage for fear of being ridiculed or for fear of reproducing a fantasy Indigeneity embodied in Chicano nationalism.

4. See Anzaldúa (1987) for more on this point. For the critique of Anzaldúa's tribalism and Indigenous appropriations, see Guidotti-Hernández 2011 and Perez, 2014.

5. For more on the idea of historic asexuality ascribed to disabled individuals, see McRuer, 2006.

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