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EPISTEMOLOGY OF FEMINIST DECOLONIALISM AND AESTHETICS OF BORDERLANDS

Key words: epistemology of borderlands, la mestiza, liminal spaces, necropolitics, epistemology of survival

Introduction

Epistemology of Borderlands. Epistemic Politics of Borderlands

No standard definition of the epistemology of borderlands exists. No standard unfolding for aesthetics and politics of the epistemes of borderlands. This study has its object of discussion looking upon the culture and the aesthetics of the borderlands today. The study has the aim to unfold the borderland through the spaces of displacements, violence, capitalism and distributions of the emancipatory strength to stay alive and to reconstruct the border(land) through the episteme and retelling traumatic stories. Some of the aspects this study would open overlaps with the form of essay – as a feminist genre for thinking difficult personal stories, through the epistemology of the borderlands.

I argue that the essay as a form - is a step beyond the scientific study, since it is always – already - in communication with the feminist epistemology and struggles that fundamentally interrogates questions of vital knowledge in times of crisis, such as wars, authority, legitimacy (it happens often while the surviving mode of the existence is happening, outside and inside the academy, confronting the codes, towards the critical form of inquiry and praxis. I argue in this text several aspects: 1) epistemology of borderlands includes different position for talking about ideology and injustices of existence and displacement; 2) I would explore this through the work of some of the main aesthetics aspects of borderlands, overlapped with the political (and necropolitical) distributions of the sensible, which is related to seeking a ground for a radical transformative episteme; 3) configuration of social inequalities take form within the intersec-

tion epistemology of the borderlands and perception of social reflections and acts. The aim is to discuss the aesthetics of the borderland through the risks of the neglected and forgotten voices in epistemology, and to recover the representational history and epistemology of the borderland through the emancipatory aesthetics and politics of the sensible “border” today, in times of global crisis.

Sandra Harding develops the concept of knowledge through the reinvestigation of power and the knowledge - Who produces knowledge? Under what conditions is a claim recognized as true? How do power relations shape the epistemic hierarchies? (Harding, 1991; Code, 1991; Collins, 2000). Inspired by Sandra Harding’s work, I argue that exploration of hierarchies in the knowledge appears from the sensing economy of the political science. The academic knowledge is deeply embedded in the oppressive social hierarchies in capitalism and the borderland is disappeared. Forcing “strong quotes” and “objectivity” in academic studies goes towards power dynamics and deletes the specific genre of expression – such as feminist essay and arguing the aesthetics of borderlands, through rethinking the epistemology. Hence, I argue that my study should be understood as an essay for rethinking the epistemology through the neglected voices of the borderlands, and uncovering the structural hierarchies. The first position to be closer to the unfolding aesthetics of the borderland is – through the epistemology of women’s lives. The embodied experience of displacements opens more complex epistemic positions for the subjects of displacements and the intimate knowl-

edge that includes as I say – the sensory capacity of the knowledge. Hence, I argue that the subject of displacements does not go through abstract knowledge and abstract reasoning of it, but the embodied experiences of the subjects of displacements live under structural oppression, traumatic experiences of the colonial violence, war, immigration, being in the context of constant survival mode. In such contexts, feminist knowledge becomes bounded to economical, ecological, political and social conditions. The subtitle of my essay I am writing now might be - Aesthetics of Borderlands Bodies – and it becomes not only subjects of knowledge, but sensory battle fields where the epistemic struggles occur—they are material and sensory active through being subjects of acting during the process of life and death. Those displaced subjects, from the borderlands perspective have become a part of the processes of subjecting in the production of borderlands, under suppression, and circulation of knowledge that is – not – yet - said.

Sandra Harding in the book *The Science Question in Feminism* (Harding, 1986) discusses the genderized sciences, public, official visible and dramatic aspects of the “official” sciences, and the non-official, less dramatic, private and invisible spheres of social life and organization in the sciences, based on “power relations, and hierarchical structures”(Harding, 1986: 121), and “androcentrism of science”(Harding, 1986: 133), vs. feminist object – relations analysis and choosing the aim of discussions. In that sense, this study I am writing as a form of essay, comes to appear important for the extensive analyses of the genre and

form to talk about scientific method related to feminist epistemology of the aesthetics of borderlands – the main object of my exploring the borderlands.

How to rediscover the stronger objectivity of the essay as a scientific study, from below?
 Therefore I decided to leave
 The country (Aztlán)
 Therefore I have come as one charged with a special duty,
 Because I have been given arrows and shields,
 For waging war is my duty,
 And on my expeditions I
 Shall see all the lands,
 I shall wait for the people and meet them
 In all four quarters and I shall give them
 Food to eat and drinks to quench their thirst
 For here I shall unite all the different peoples!
Huitzilopochtli
 speaking to the Azteca-Mexica
 Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands* (Anzaldúa, 1987: 31)

Rethinking the aesthetics of borderlands leads me to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and her theory of borderlands, where she situates epistemology within the lived realities of marginalized and hybridized spaces. Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) discuss the emotions in the process of writing “objective” aspects, “the more intense the emotion is, the greater my reception of it” (Anzaldúa, 1987: 39), and she calls it *La facultad*, it is about the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structures below the surface. It is about acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feel-

ings, that is behind which feelings reside/hide. I argue that here the experience of the self (soul) happens, related to the scientific method of arguing in the epistemology, so the new form of writing essays as a legitimate academic genre – appears. This method of *la facultad* – is the core center where the aesthetics of borderlands must happen.

... *la facultad*. But there is a deeper sensing that is another aspect of this faculty. It is anything that breaks into one’s everyday mode of perception, that causes a break in one’s defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one’s habitual grounding, causes the depths to open up, causes a shift in perception. This shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul). As we plunge vertically, the break, with its accompanying new seeing, makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness – an experiencing of soul (Self). We lose something in this mode of initiation, something is taken from us: our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and easy ignorance. There is a prejudice and a fear of the dark, chthonic (underworld), material such as depression, illness, death and the violations that can bring on this break. Confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness and that thrusts us into a less literal and more psychic sense of reality increases awareness and *la facultad*.

Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands* (Anzaldúa, 1987: 39)

I read Anzaldúa’s border – not merely as a geographic or political site but as an epistemic space

where intersectional aspects of poetics and politics of the borderlands appear - language, colonial histories, hybrid spaces, dialectical and embodied ways of knowing. Aesthetics of the border's epistemologies is aesthetics of resist against hierarchical, and colonial knowledge paradigms. Aesthetics of the borders is *intersectional, situated, contextual, related to experiential knowledges* of the body in – between, against discourses of power, always already in survival mode of being. This essay explores how a feminist social epistemology rooted in aesthetics and politics of borderlands illuminates the intimate knowledge, power, and survival, particularly under necropolitical conditions where migrant bodies are disposable. Anzaldúa's epistemic insights are close to María Lugones's decolonial feminism, which exposes coloniality in gendered epistemologies, and even more closer to Lauren Berlant's analysis of precarity and affect of the body. Maria Lugones in "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" discusses the hierarchy of the performance in sciences through the concept of "colonial civilizing mission" (Lugones, 2010a: 744), which is the euphemistic mask of brutal access to people's bodies through unimaginable exploitation, violent sexual violation, systematic terror. This mission uses the hierarchical gender dichotomy as a judgment, though the attainment of dichotomous gendering for the colonized, is not the point of the normative judgement. The embodied and emotional dimensions of survival borderland subjects are related to structural violence. Hence, in this essay, I argue that the concept of aesthetics of borderlands and the colonialism is related to the dehumaniza-

tion constitutive of the coloniality of being. The civilizing transformation justified the colonization of the memory. Here comes the concept of theorizing resistance in epistemology of the borderlands.

In my essay "Intersectional Humanism" (Anastasova, 2022) which is a rethinking of the work of Hegel and Raya Dunayevskaya, I argue that forms of liberations are dialectical, hence, the intersectional feminist epistemology has many epistemic positions as - intersection of embodiment, displacement, marginalized bodies, in-between border bodies. If Sandra Harding emphasizes that scientific knowledge influenced by social location, then the body from the margins – is the body that comes from the *blind spots* in dominant epistemologies. Aesthetics and politics of borderlands, is about how knowledge production perpetuates inequality and the will to survive, legal or illegal. The body from the margins at the borderland exposes the limitations of hegemonic assumptions. Maria Lugones expresses this in a way that thinking the coloniality of gender enables to understand the oppressive imposition as a complex interaction of economic, racializing, and gendering systems in which every person in the colonial encounter can be found as "a live, historical, fully described being" (Lugones, 2010a: 747). How the body in survival mood feels the knowledge? Lugones discusses this through the hierarchical dichotomy that constitutes the subjectification of the colonized. And this brings the core aspect of the developing the active subjectivity of the colonized against the colonial invasion of self in community from the inhabitation of that self. (Lugones, 2010a: 749)

Border thinking ... is a logical consequence difference. . . . [T]he fractured locus of subaltern perspective defines border thinking the colonial difference, (x)

It is also the space where the restitution of is taking place and where border thinking is emerging

The colonial differences, around the planet, are the house where border epistemology dwells

Maria Lugones (Lugones, 2010a: 753)

When I am developing the new feminist epistemic and aesthetics thinking of the borders, then I think of the liminality of the border as a ground, as a space, and as borderlands – said with Gloria Anzaldúa words. What are the logic of dichotomies here? How to talk about feminist epistemology, aesthetics and politics of borders, and still how to build scientific stances through the form of an essay?¹ Audre Lorde in *Sister outsider – Essays and Speeches* (2007) opens another horizon for scientific thinking that is about the logic of dichotomies. And the logic is rooted always in the position of power. The multiplicity is never reduced.

I mark here the work of Patricia Hill Collins. Collins in “The Difference That Power Makes: Intersectionality, and Participatory Democracy” (2017) develops an epistemic perspective generated from the historically oppressed women, and unveils the structural contradictions inherent in dominant epistemic hierarchies. By acknowledging the situated knowledge of Black women, Patricia Hill Collins shows how epistemic authority is socially constructed and often complicit in maintaining

power asymmetries. Drawn by Collins the participatory democracy related to the borderlands opens aspirational social justice projects that take form through praxis of displacements and invisible politics, matrix of domination in neo-colonialist societies, where the body turns against the oppression. Lorraine Code in *Epistemic Responsibility* (2020) expresses that this knowledge is happening as a process of being in capacity to act, to survive. The knowing subject in surviving mode moves against the systematic failure (Code, 2020: xxiii). Going beyond traditional epistemology that prioritizes disembodied reason and abstract objectivity, often marginalizing embodied, emotional, relational, and political knowledge, I argue that feminist epistemology is strongly focused on embodied and experiential knowledge as a legitimate resistance against colonialism.

Migration and border violence are epistemic lines where conventional epistemic positions are not integrated for structural injustices.

Epistemology of the Border – Dialectic Liminal Spaces

Gloria Anzaldúa’s work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* situates knowledge within the lived experiences of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The border is both material and metaphorical, an “open wound” (una herida abierta) that bleeds, representing the historical and ongoing vi-

¹ This essay “Epistemology of Feminist Decolonialism and Aesthetics of Borderlands” has been redacted by the journal *Context*, in June, 2026, with a note – not to be written as an essay, but as a “scientific study”, which, again, I think and feel, urges the importance of the exploring, what stays between science and the philosophical – artistic - performative form of expression, such as essay is?

olence of colonialism, racialization, and gendered oppression (Anzaldúa, 1987: 25).

For Anzaldúa, the border is not a faceless, neutral geographic boundary but an epistemic space where knowledge is produced through intersection, hybridity, and contradiction. It is a space where politics of resistance and cultures collide, where languages intersect, challenging monolingual epistemic norms, where social identities are repeatedly negotiated, disciplined, and contested. Migrant and Borderlands Bodies become sites of inclusion, exclusion, and survival struggles. This conceptualization gives another aspect of intersectional epistemology, I argue that the sensory - skin - knowledge is not discovered in isolation or abstraction but emerges from the living in and negotiating liminal, dialectical spaces.

Anzaldúa introduces the concept of La Mestiza Consciousness as Epistemic Praxis - *la mestiza consciousness* as both identity and epistemic methodology. The *mestiza* navigates multiple, dialectical realities, developing what she terms a *tolerance for ambiguity* (Anzaldúa, 1987: 99). I read through her work the sensory knowledge of the dialectical understanding of the body against the rigid binary positions, against dominant epistemologies. The epistemic practices of *la mestiza* are in relation to interrogating categorical hierarchies, rather than assimilating, the *mestiza* questions the very structures that define the norm and the margin. In this sense the sensory knowledge should come from below, from in-between spaces, embracing dialectical positions, instead of resolving them. This is important for feminist epistemology and intersectional feminist epistemology, because of the embod-

ied sensory knowing and feeling – the borderland body itself becomes a site of epistemic authority, particularly as lived experience at the margins and always already in the mode of survival and pain. This in-between epistemology destabilizes the presumed rigid positions of dominant knowledge and refuses the “objective” observer. For Anzaldúa, the *mestiza* produces knowledge precisely because she exists at the margins, navigating epistemic, social, and cultural contradictions. For me, the *mestiza* produces sensory knowledge that opens aesthetics of resistance against rigid structures of power, against colonial epistemic norms. This creates space for epistemologies that would disrupt the hegemony of monolingual, standardized knowledge. Following Anzaldúa, the sensory knowledge is a part of linguistic and cultural position of the knower. This insight is crucial for understanding epistemology in borderlands, where linguistic multiplicity enables forms of resistance and critical reflection unavailable to dominant epistemic regimes.

Conclusion

Borderlands and Necropolitics - Towards the Feminist Epistemology of Survival

Feminist epistemology and aesthetics of borderlands stays in front of the new epistemic challenges in front of the wars of 21 century – somewhere between - bodies that know and bodies that die. Achille Mbembe’s theory of necropolitics examines how sovereignty exercises control over life and death. Necropolitical regimes determine

which lives are expendable, which deaths are visible, and which bodies can be ignored or erased, but more important it is not situated in the national sphere of political studies (Mbembe, 2003: 11). This open empirical and philosophical questions. The border is a quintessential necropolitical space: migrant bodies are surveilled, criminalized, and often rendered disposable. These deaths are not incidental but are structured by economic inequality, racialized state policies, and global capitalism. In necropolitical regimes death becomes a political instrument, the living are disciplined and surveilled to maintain social hierarchies, some bodies are socially dead even while biologically alive. When Anzaldúa describes the border as an open wound, she anticipates the necropolitical violence faced by politics of migrants. After 21th century wars and threatening of nuclear weapons, bodies die attempting to cross deserts or seas; these deaths are often unrecorded or depersonalized. Unknown. Those who survive are continually subject to displacements, and limitations, and a part of structural forms of control, or illegal, faceless, the rest part of the systemic oppression and discourse of power. Migrant deaths reveal the epistemic violence of erasure - their experiences are rarely acknowledged as knowledge or testimony. What one does read from the border epistemology of Anzaldúa? That these deaths encode critical information about structural power and exclusion. By failing to recognize these lives as epistemically meaningful, dominant knowledge systems perpetuate colonial and necropolitical logics.

Whitin these perspective, there are several lines that must be included in the conclusion of this essay.

First, in decolonial feminist epistemology of María Lugones I read that Lugones's work complements Gloria Anzaldúa by addressing the colonial production of gender and knowledge. She critiques Western feminist epistemology for ignoring colonial histories and intersectional oppression (Lugones, 2007, 2010). Lugones demonstrates that colonialism reorganized Indigenous and African social systems, producing gender categories as tools of control. This coloniality of gender shapes who is recognized as a knower and whose epistemologies are marginalized. Knowledge production cannot be neutral; it is always embedded within historical, racial, and colonial structures. To talk about modernity is really to talk about coloniality, for modernity requires coloniality to constitute itself (Lugones, 2007). Lugones introduces the epistemic capacity to understand and inhabit another's world. This method aligns with Anzaldúa's border epistemology, emphasizing: empathy as cognitive tool, recognition of difference as epistemic resource, hybrid epistemologies that emerge from lived experiences of margins and oppression.

Second, I argue that decolonial feminist epistemology insists on another knowledge that must account for sensory and lived experiences of those historically excluded, being in-between, being on the edge of, always already. Or, in the Lauren Berlant's work it has always been about the concept of politics of Affect and epistemic conditions that shape survival circumstance of the subjects of surviving, as she says under structural violence (Berlant, 2011). It could be social and epistemic injustice: those living in precarious conditions must constantly negotiate knowledge, hope, and survival strategies. Later, migrants and refugees live in

uncertainty, affecting what they know and can act upon. Uncertain life produces epistemic reflexivity, as survival depends on reading power structures and anticipating danger. Affect and emotions are not secondary to knowledge, they are integral to understanding political and social realities, always neglected. In necropolitical contexts, Berlant's work emphasizes that knowledge is felt in the body, highlighting the embodied dimension of epistemology. And that is what I call epistemic evidence. Looking for epistemic evidence. Ignored slow dying of the subject in between – under structural violence, state neglect, and racialized economic logics. Feminist decolonial epistemology demands that these deaths be recognized as evidence rather than one more number. The evidence must be hidden, not reported to media cycles. Those ignored bodies are invisible in epistemic frame that privilege legal or political recognition. Those ignored but alive – but vanished bodies – are already erased from the social knowledge, perpetuating colonial and necropolitical hierarchies.

Third, Anzaldúa's border epistemology contends that these bodies know something crucial about power—their deaths encode lessons about structural exclusion, racial capitalism, and the limits of dominant epistemic recognition. Hence, it's always been a try to find another position to think and feel.

Developing a feminist social epistemology attentive to Anzaldúa I argue that the feminist epistemology reframe epistemology around – the survival mode of the subject of 21st century in context of

capitalism and war machine today. *La mestiza* embodies knowledge that arises from contradiction, hybridity, and negotiation. Feminist epistemology of survival is not merely biological but epistemic: it requires maintaining the capacity to feel, to know, interpret, resist, and reinterpret amidst systemic violence and discourses of power in capitalism and techno-feudalism. Lugones's world-traveling and Berlant's affect theory gives aspects of the epistemology that resists the erasure of the margins, and knowledge – in – between margins, recognizes empathy and vulnerability as epistemically meaningful, rejects normalization of the violence and grand narratives. This epistemology is politically transformative, against colonialism, and necropolitical regimes. Hence, this feminist political epistemology is sensitive to epistemic justice beyond borders, that involves resistance to colonial epistemologies that marginalize hybrid, embodied knowers, and stays against persistent epistemic hierarchies that privilege binaries over complex lived experiences.

The conclusion remarks of this essay shows that borderlands epistemology related feminist political epistemology with a radical alternative: knowledge that emerges from the intersection, different form of saying and writing, new feminist voices looking and exploring another form of traces, fulfillment of gaps, contradiction, hybridity, and survival in the global world of crisis. In a current world of militarized borders, war, racial capitalism, and epistemic violence, such epistemologies are focused on justice, survival, sensory embodiment of the voice and truth.

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Епистемологија на феминистичкиот деколонијализам и
 естетика на граничните подрачја
 (Резиме)

Есејот го истражува феминистичкиот деколонијалитет како метод и праксис на отелотворување на сепитилниот сознаен опит и политиката на граничните подрачја (borderlands). Во овој контекст се елаборира на кој начин феминистичката епистемологија отвора нови димензии во рамките на специфичните конфликти и злосторства против човештвото (војни, раселувања, барање азил). Чинот на дислокација на деколонијалните

тела во новиот меѓупростор и меѓуместо, како и некрополитичкото насилство на капитализмот, поттикнуваат критичко преиспитување на онтоепистемолошките и политичките импликации на граничните подрачја на раселеноста и „битието-во-желбата-за-преживување“ – како единствен можен радикален феминистички чин на мислење и дејствување.

Овој епистемолошко-политички правец на редефинирање на епистемата на граничните простори, некрозата и политиката, го сочинува вториот дел од елаборацијата во есејот. Целта е да се аргументира дека феминистичкиот деколонијалитет е вкоренет во економската неправда, како и во историскиот и расниот материјализам. Овој пристап ги следи капиталистичките редефинирања на трансформативната правда и феминистичката неправда, кои сè уште претставуваат отворен процес на нелинеарна епистемологија и мисловен процес исполнет со дисконтинуитети, амплитуди и борби за опстанок.

Наведените концепти се истражуваат низ призмата на актуелните масовни процеси на миграција, војни, колонијални претензии, расен капитализам, присилни миграции, системи на насилство и невидливо насилство. Тие се третираат како нови парадигми за промислување на епистемологијата на феминистичкиот социјален деколонијалитет денес, во постковид периодот и помеѓу световите на дистописката сегашност на војни и воена некрофилија. Надежта на феминистичката епистемологија против колонијализмот е вкоренета во новото читање на феминистичкиот предизвик против војната и во отворањето простор за најупорните форми на маргинализација во рамките на епистемичката дисциплина и интерсекционалноста.

Клучни зборови: епистемологија на граничните подрачја, *la mestiza* (хибриден идентитет), лиминални простори, некрополитика, епистемологија на преживувањето

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