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Different readings and evoked conversations. A piece on the generative power of dialogue and co-thinking

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Abstract

In this dialogic piece we insist on the value of keeping alive critical debates about how academic knowledge is produced, when it comes to understanding the complexities involved in laying bare the impact of socioeconomic and sociocultural differences crossing borders and contexts. The climate for conversations about difference is constructed and moved by sentiments like rage, shame, guilt, and resentment but also connectedness and shared excitement. Human conversations across difference involve risk-taking but also engagement, evocation and inspiration. Here we make a humble intent to do so, taking as a point of departure our participation in a symposium held to launch Christina Hee Pedersen's book *Collaborative Research Methodologies* (2021). We use collaborative writing as a method of inquiry to explore how our understandings of concepts like intersectionality, social in- and exclusion, social justice and different knowledge forms represent a challenge to academic subjects within a pronounced audit culture, filled with competition and unequal employment conditions. We argue that explorative conversations are pivotal to cultivate feminist, anti-racist and decolonial pockets of critical, collaborative research and teaching practices.

KEYWORDS: Collaborative research methodologies, difference, decoloniality, intersectionality, affect

A text born out of a fruitful encounter

This dialogic piece was born out of a fruitful encounter between the three authors in Denmark in October 2021. We came together in a symposium as commentators of Christina Hee Pedersen's book launching of *Crafting Collaborative Research Methodologies. Leaps and Bounds in Interdisciplinary Inquiry* (Pedersen 2021). Christina's book gave us an invaluable opportunity to delve into issues of difference and collaboration in research methodologies that was in many ways unexpected. In this dialogic piece, we insist on the value of keeping alive the critical conversations that arise in human encounters like seminars, symposiums, or conferences. Conversations about what we consider important knowledge, how we destabilize our taken-for-granted thinking through encounters with others, and how we deal with the complexities involved in laying bare the impact of socioeconomic and sociocultural differences. The climate for conversations about difference is often constructed and moved by sentiments of rage, shame, guilt, and resentment, but not seldom also feelings like connectedness, identification, friendship, and the thrill of joint discovery. We named our online communication platform for making this piece *The adventure of writing*. We find it meaningful to contribute and share our conversations about and across difference, conversations which not only involve affect and risk-taking but also break down barriers that sometimes appear unsurmountable. We hope it can engage, evoke, and inspire others in their work.

Christina knew Breny and Adriana long before the symposium. Breny and Christina have known each other since 1985 through their work in the feminist NGO in Peru *Manuela Ramos*. Adriana and Christina were fellow activists in the early years of *GALF*, a lesbian feminist organization in Peru (Jitsuya & Sevilla, 2008). However, Breny and Adriana had never met before the symposium in Denmark, and we were not very familiar with the academic work of each other.

Christina's book *Crafting collaborative research methodologies. Leaps and bounds in*

interdisciplinary inquiry at the center of the symposium gathers the fruits of many years of research and teaching. It is an assemblage of texts which blurs genres, geographies and theoretical traditions and it communicates and explores concrete experiments with collaboration in a double move of evocation and interpretation/analysis. It presents several practical methods based on poststructuralist feminist takes on methodology/analysis working with images, memory work and intersectionality. Through collective work with texts co-produced in Peru, Denmark, and Bolivia she explores the production of dominance, social exclusion and normativity with the intertwined concepts: *subjectification*, *belonging* and *social change*.

Here we use collaborative writing as a method of inquiry to explore how our understandings of concepts as diverse as methodology, intersectionality, coloniality, subjectivity, social in- and exclusion, social justice and committed knowledge production represent a challenge to researchers living in a pronounced audit culture, filled with competition and unequal employment conditions worldwide. We hold that such explorative conversations are necessary to cultivate feminist, anti-racist and decolonial pockets of critical, collaborative research and teaching practices. What you are about to read is a constructed conversation, an extract of a rich reading and writing process where we, through different 'downfalls' in the texts, put together an assemblage of ideas related to collaboration and difference that we have found meaningful to share through a 'slow conversational style.' We invite the reader to 'give in' and patiently follow the flow we have constructed to present insights about the multifaceted nature of academic collaboration and the generative power of dialogue.

What did we do, and how

We come from different disciplines and occupy different positions in the colonial structures of power. We recognize that we as all researchers are implicated in (re)producing dynamics of

power and norms when we read and evaluate our own academic work and that of others. Here we engage in the adventure of an open and unfinished dialogue (Bakhtin 1981, Phillips 2011). Our departures and arrivals are different, but we have been driven by an evoked curiosity to explore the generative power of dialogue. We share a common commitment to feminism. In our process, we have made use of different kinds of texts as sites of encounter and self(inquiry). We take as our point of departure a fragment from Christina's book and parts of Breny's and Adriana's presentations at the symposium. Subsequently, we write letters to each other and share our immediate reactions virtually. We consider this approach as one of many ways to generate knowledge, create topics of relevance and human connections across different positions and affects. With this we invite the readers to follow the outcomes of a collaborative process.

Christina had asked Adriana and Breny to model their presentations at the symposium over four simple questions: What impressed you when you read the chapter assigned to you? What did the reading make you think about? In what ways could you use the ideas in the chapter in your own work? Did the chapter raise important questions in relation to research/teaching about collaborative research and difference?

Moved by our encounter at the symposium we set off by re-reading a small section from the beginning of Christina's book and the presentations of Breny and Adriana. Based on Christina's experience with a methodology of letter writing to generate insights we wrote one or two pages with our immediate reactions (Pedersen, Phillips, Frydendahl 2021, Phillips & Pedersen 2020). We let two simple questions guide our letters: 'What made the biggest impression on you when reading the letters - and why?' We started out with a round of ten minutes condensed talk online with immediate reactions, followed by dialogue on topics evoked by our conversation. Using the genre of open-ended dialogue, we sought to create room for expressing doubts, sharing personal experiences introspection, analytical points, and new questions.

The topics of common concern are related to ideas about difference, collaboration, academic work, and the research subject. Arriving at a closure in our conversation, we end with a reflection about some tensional moments that arose regarding in relation to the issue of otherness. These moments have allowed us to reflect even more on the impact of difference, affect and power in collaborative research. Let us set into motion our assemblage:

Texts of departure

What follows is a small extract from Christina's book from her first chapter where she talks about the meaning and function of the concepts *difference* and *experience*:

"It is common to state that it is important to always address *differences* within the human and social sciences (Hall, 1997). I have to admit that for me the tensions and difficulties in theorizing difference persist. In every day meaning making our expectations and imaginaries work in relation to cultural codes and norms and how these connect to the constructed social categories. The biological signs on our bodies; breasts, white skin, body weight for example make us decode these signs in normative frameworks. We use difference to make sense of our surroundings, to take contact, to create distance, to legitimize our own norms or simply to describe the worlds we are part of. I am utterly aware that some of my writing without me being aware address difference in ways that may reproduce hierarchies and binary positionings about race and class for example. In fact, I want to show how this takes place through language in some of the analysis presented. In many academic texts you have for decades witnessed a most of all ritualistic mentioning of how difference and intersections among social categories play an important role in the unfolding of any social phenomena. Ann Phoenix calls this the difficult 'couplet of difference and identity' and she talks about it as a couplet that is taken up but also resisted in academic work (Phoenix, 2008).

In commonsense understandings difference is most often associated with identity and social categories. Therefore, a clear danger when a group in collaborative processes talk difference into being is to assume homogeneity within social groups and also to other differences in the name of consensus. One could say that collaborative methodologies per se take place within and with the dynamic entanglement of difference and commonality and often create a temporary common ground for those who collaborate.

(...) In line with decades of feminist thinking, I hold that an important point of departure, be taken in *experience*, or more precisely, what we as individuals have come to recognize as experience, sensation, and reality. Despite my strong epistemological and ontological base in feminist post-structuralism, I find it necessary to hold on to a starting point with roots in feminist activist practices and in what could look like a phenomenological take on what is commonly recognized as 'known and owned' by both individual and a group as a 'reality'. I am committed to a humanist ideal where the potentials produced through human encounters require the construction of a common ground for communication and a basic recognition of the 'other' and the possibility to learn from him, they or her. In a human encounter, we establish this common ground by aiming at constructing an account that convinces oneself and the other. We do this by linking together life episodes into long, causal sequences and by singling out certain events that we give a specific significance. I understand the telling of experiences as social constructions, created by a narrator in close interaction with the situation and the expected cultural norms. As such, what we share is put together with the help of culturally available instruments and ingredients (Bourdieu, 1986; Järvinen, 2000, p. 372).

When establishing research relations with a commitment to learning, a precondition must be that participants can enter subject-subject relations. This means that during the research process it becomes possible to relate respectfully to one another as unique and worthy participants. In such encounters, the claim or the reference to 'experience' is key, as it is activated through language

and vital when we make contact and share our stories with the other, even if we in constructivist terms understand this narration of ourselves as a construction. Construction or not, the effects of our understandings of the world are as real as can be. Reality will always be mediated to us by language and so embodied that we perceive experience as a dear belonging that make us who we are - a constantly constructed base upon which we live (Hultman & Taguchi, 2010; Olesen & Pedersen, 2013; St. Pierre, 2011)""

*

Breny read chapter two and chapter nine in Christina's book. In chapter two Christina presents her repertoire of theoretical concepts. Concepts like *subjectification*, *belonging* and *social change* are explained and brought to work in a small story to direct attention to complexities in meaning-making related to social differentiation. The concepts represent a certain reflexive development within feminist poststructuralist traditions – a theoretical conversation 'on the move' where the research subject is recognized an active participant in the (re)production of hegemonic positions.

In chapter nine *intersectional thinking* is used to explore the analytical possibilities implied in handling texts as jointly produced and unstable. A collaborative re-writing strategy is used to analyze sociocultural norms and the concrete effects of social categorization in interpretation. Christina had asked Breny to read these two chapters, recognizing Breny's expertise related to the content feeling at the same time a little nervous about how a decolonial reading of her work would look. This is part of Breny's reading at the symposium:

"Bringing educación popular or popular education together with poststructuralism as does Christina in her book is quite a task. Perhaps this is one of the most outstanding feats of her work. You see, Educación popular is a Latin American political pedagogy of the sixties much rooted in Marxism that also inspired collaborative research methodologies such as Orlando Fals Borda's participatory action research (Fals Borda 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1981, 1984; Robles & Rappaport,

2018). But what Christina is doing in her book is very different and innovative. She engages the researcher in a process of deep self-interrogation and self-reflection through textual analyses and other post-structural strategies which were not present at all in previous participatory action research methodologies. Why is this important? Well, because while both collaborative methodologies seek social transformation, participatory action research was concerned mainly with giving the knowledge produced by the researcher back to the 'subjects-objects' of the research, it did not require a preceding or a subsequent self-examination of the social positions of the researcher. He or she remained partially invisible throughout the process of investigation. And in so being the top-down approach of traditional research or the relations of power between the participants of the research were left largely unanalyzed. Christina does the exact opposite. She uses poststructural theories as her guideline and as her framework of analysis to reveal the cultural norms, and the technologies (microphysics) of power that are operating in the process of writing and rewriting the texts that make up the fieldwork of her research, or her memory work. Her collaborative methodology is bound to a process of self-discovery and uncovering and even public exposure of the compromised nature of our social positions that requires courage, honesty, and ethical integrity. I can feel throughout the pages of the book the noble desire to exhume the power that a Nordic woman senses is buried in the margins, in between the lines, and in the depths of her own writing. But that is not the only thing that is happening; she compels the reader to enter into a dialogue with the texts she has chosen as part of the process of her self-interrogation. As a reader you are pulled in as a protagonist of the stories she is sharing. Not only do you feel like becoming the observer of her memory or perhaps the observed, but her memory also becomes part of the repertoire of your own memories. You literally imagine witnessing what she is witnessing and retelling. But are you? You know as a fact that you are outside of her memory, that her memory does not belong to you and that you would have told the story differently. What has

taken place then? You realize that you have become a collaborator of the analytical process she has put in motion. Such that at the other end of the memory/story, you not only produce your own analysis of her memory but have begun enmeshing your own memories with hers and started your own process of self-interrogation. This is one of the finest moments of Christina's collaborative methodology.

She gives us an excellent example of how this happens in chapter two with the memory of an incident that she recorded in the mid-80s at the Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands. In this memory or in my memory of her memory, Christina observes a Latin American middle-aged man (she does not reveal his race, but I imagine he is probably an upper-middle-class Peruvian of mestizo-criollo origin) at the gate in a flight to Lima, Peru. She describes him as taking up too much space, his body language showing too much assertiveness, he's interacting with a waitress that she assumes might be Peruvian also and he speaks to her with an accented English (like mine) that irritates her. Couldn't he have just spoken to her in Spanish she asks herself. He initiates an uninvited conversation with a group of younger men (nationality unclear) that just came back from Paris. Christina senses they are uncomfortable with him because he blurts out an old-fashioned stereotypical French utterance like *oh-la-la* which brings the conversation to an end. She interprets his utterance as overtly sexual which turns off the younger men. I sense she thinks this is stereotypical Latin macho behavior. The man also treats his wife with excessive deference or perhaps condescension by demonstrating at every moment who's in charge. He seems to have command of everything around him, but from Christina's perspective this man is missing all European cultural cues.

At this point of her retelling of her memory, I am a little terrified. I am stunned at the speculative nature of her comments and of the tone. But then Christina begins unpacking this incident and her discursive power. Step by step she uncovers the binary constructions she infuses in the textual memory, the racial tension that traverses her comments about the man, her overidentification

with the waitress and his wife and her presuppositions. Christina becomes acutely aware that she has written into the text of her memory, her privilege as a white European woman. She uses Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone "where cultures, meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt, 1991) to interpret the situation at the Schiphol airport and to come to terms with the meanings she has produced in the text that reveal the discursive power that she possesses as a European cisgender woman and scholar. The memory work and the textual analysis following post-structural understandings of power as productive, the double nature of subjectification, and self-governmentality allow her to reexamine her own assumptions and to reevaluate the cultural norms embedded in the meaning-making process with which she has imbued her memory work. I leave out a sigh of relief. The collaborative methodology has worked wonders. It has laid out in the open the tensions and disturbances that are produced in the encounter of a white woman with the Other and has provided the tools to engage with them constructively. The researcher has courageously and voluntarily engaged in an act of self-revelation and recognized the mutual humanity of the observer and the observed Other. Christina, the Danish scholar has fought the demons of power face to face and has taken the life out of them. She can now find like she says a more livable coexistence with the different Other, but also with herself."

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Adriana was the second speaker at the symposium. Christina had asked Adriana to read chapter seven about the production of otherness in language. Through the analysis of a memory work from Peru the chapter demonstrates the workings of ideas we create of ourselves and others. The empirical material is a written memory about a dance performance realized in the late 80s by Christina in the activist lesbian group GALF where

they both had been members. This experience was turned into a written memory based on a 'memory work' session with a group of feminist friends in Lima, who explored the dynamic tension related to similitude and difference among women. Christina was both curious and afraid to hear Adriana's reading of her analysis confronted by the risk that Adriana could maybe feel 'upset' by the obvious otherings displayed in Christina's analysis. This is an extract of Adriana's read on the symposium:

"The chapter you asked me to read was an example of a collaborative memory work where you had facilitated a memory work session with a group of feminist friends in 2009 seeking to explore to understand the effects of modifications within feminist discourses on difference. The situation you describe in your story is a 'homemade' choreography where you Christina danced. We are in Lima, Peru.

The dance performance you write about took place 30 years ago as part of the cultural/political activities of GALF an activist group we both belonged to. Christina's memory about her dance performance was written as an example of how women across differences share common interests but is at the same time a text about the entangled production of difference and commonality. The remembered situation is a dance performance and therefore also connects body/writing.

The best word to describe my reaction after reading the chapter is *confusion* and *discomfort*. Let me explain a little more to better understand my reaction. I found myself divided between two aspects of what we can call my identity today: My academic side, the "training" in the discipline of literature of the last 20 years - a background that conditions my reactions every time I confront a text in search of interpretation. And on the other hand the memories of the 19-year-old Adriana, a young aspirant to GALF, the only lesbian feminist organization at the time that my first girlfriend and I were lucky to bump into in the Lima of the 1980s.

Unable to decide from which one of those perspectives I should prepare my talk - this tensional juxtaposition formed my reaction. I eventually decided to leave the personal side apart and center my effort in a traditional academic manner.

I confronted the text with order and discipline to become aware of my 'place of enunciation.' I work with Cultural Analysis in Latin American Studies, which means that I deal with interpretations, de-constructions and 'reading' of texts, novels, films, colonial sources and even song lyrics and comics. I automatically adjust myself to the steps of analyzing to arrive at an interpretation. But in Latin American Studies this is a complex matter. I frequently find myself "distracted" because concentrating on a cultural object also means setting aside that most of the time this 'object' is also part of my national, regional, and sometimes -even personal history, being a Peruvian Andean woman

Automatically I began reading the original text written by Christina wanting to add my own perspectives and observations about the story straight away, and these were my first observations:

I was surprised by the conviction of the author in making use of dance, music, and body language as a communication tool. In cultural analysis we learn that if there are two areas that are mined with culture and present difficulties for interpretation those are the ones. Because each of the concepts that integrate dance and body language are tied to cultural rituals, flexible conceptualization and misconceptions, eurocentrism, norms and values, gender, class, and power. They are powerful political manifestations. What amazed me was that the dancer in the story (Christina) is so certain that her message of her performance will be understood by others. The trust in the power of the author's imagination, the accuracy of her performance to make visible lesbian love were quite inspiring BUT... when the conclusions arrived, I got confused: What exactly did "*The night turn out to be a success*" or "*They have created a cultural space for women*" mean? New questions arose from these lines: Why was it a success? How was it measured? No other comments included who "they" (the other members of GALF?) were. Because the memory was a description of the dancer's personal preparation in creating the choreography, interpreting, and performing it I missed a personal summary, like for example: "*She ends up happy*" or "*she has shared very important feelings*

and proposals." But what creates confusion is that the title announces "*Dancing self and group into being*" so the expectations related to the dance were not only about a personal development but also a collective one. "*They*" have gained a cultural space and the possibility of doing more things in the future. There is an aspiration in the protagonist to have contributed to a cultural event with a dance crossed by other (political) issues that were not addressed at all.

Then I realized that the text had already been analyzed in 2009 during a memory work session with feminist friends and I felt out of place. I did not understand my task at the symposium: What exactly could I say? I read the chapter again and surprised myself by stopping and reflecting profoundly on these two lines: "*painful sense of otherness*" and "*moments of disruption and discomfort.*"

And then I realized the real effect of the text: the "*feeling of uneasiness*" was related to the fact of me being confronted with the limitations of my own academic tools for this task. I was suddenly reflecting and questioning the essence of my own place of enunciation. That was the discomfort the text generated, that was the real discovery from my work with the chapter. The text was the subject to work with, but the person-reader was the one to be questioned.

My reading of the chapter also made me think about my work situation. Most of my colleagues are Latin American. We face the same experience but deal with it in different ways. We exchange comments and tips, which works as a bonding strategy, but we never talk about our experience in a more analytical way to create a common opinion about these issues. Thus, the chapter inspired me to think about the creative potential of 'memories.' I didn't realize that the act of remembering (personal) events could be transformed into a tool for analysis. Applying analytical strategies most often means distancing yourself from the object of analysis but not always questions are posed to the academic subject doing the analysis.

Our students make a short trip to Latin America as part of their study program. Their work presents a frequent problem: they draw on stereotypical images of Latin America, its landscapes,

peoples, or cultural products. Dealing with the student's construction of otherness can be an exhausting enterprise. The teacher's work is double: to teach them the formalities of academic research and then the necessary 'academic distance' that allows students to reflect upon their own conceptions that they consider globally valid, irrefutable and undoubtedly modern and superior to the center of their study: the Latin American other.

When it comes to my/our own memories from GALF I find it incredibly interesting to think about applying a collective exercise of memory work to recall incidents from the past, about collective events that have been processed differently by the persons we have become. Maybe that could be the beginning of the big enterprise of rewriting our own story as a group - especially in view of the plethora of works that are beginning to appear which create, in my opinion, an unrecognizable story of the first Peruvian lesbian organization."

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The letters

Christina wrote the first letter in Spanish - the language we use to communicate - hoping thereby to get a fluid, more personal and direct contact, and communication.

Dear Breny and Adriana,

For me personally the symposium was an unforgettable experience, and it was lovely to re-read your presentations from that day. Little remains when you try to hold on to an oral presentation. But it was difficult to make this a short letter as there was much to say. Your presentations were condensed and complex and they touched on a wide range of topics at a profound and fundamental level; what is it to be a person, citizen, academic and activist in our times.

Adriana, you write that the chapter you read placed you in a position where it was difficult for you to choose between what you call 'the academic Adriana' and 'the personal Adriana'. You describe

this as an uncomfortable dilemma in your work situation and that it exhausts you - that your teaching often leads to tense and complex situations, where you simultaneously represent the privileged teacher, the one who evaluates the students, the powerful representative of the institution and 'the other', about which the students have to learn/analyze/describe.

When I read your presentation again, I wondered if you had felt othered by the way I wrote about GALF? In the chapter I analyze how otherness come into being through language. I demonstrate in detail how both individual and collective subjects are produced in complex dynamics of in- and exclusion. It was the analysis itself that lead me to exhibit an uncomfortable self-exposure of firstness. My question is: how did it make you feel to read my analysis of an experience shared by the two of us many years ago in GALF? Were you exhausted from reading the 'painful sense of my production of otherness'?

You also write that the easiest way for you is to avoid the inclusion of the personal dimension, but I also read between the lines that you are not satisfied with the option of totally excluding 'the personal Adriana'. The mixed emotions of discomfort, confusion, surprise, inspiration and amazement generated by the reading seem to exist simultaneously. I wonder if this is a result of being 'made other' by my descriptions? I also now ask myself if the certainty of the protagonist in the memory of the dance - a certainty that surprises you - could be an expression of privilege? How the white body per se at that point in time automatically gave access to the Peruvian reality. At the same time, the memory is a story of a person fighting to be included. A person that wants to escape the social category 'gringa' and longs to be just another participant in the group. Tell me what you think.

I actually invited you to precisely read these chapters to learn more from your readings as I had my doubts about how my texts could be read by others, - taking into account the sometimes-harsh atmosphere surrounding discussions about identities and privilege. You suggest Breny that there is a danger involved in the self-disclosures that I perform in my analysis. Does the analytical process of

making visible the formation of meaning and the position of power of the research subject become just one more example of putting the white feminist at the center of a text?

Considering my insecurity, I was relieved though to hear Breny say that you consider the tools I present practical contributions to collectively engage in relations that are highly asymmetrical.

I am looking forward to receiving your letters - don't be too harsh with my Spanish, ...love Christina

Dear Breny and Christina, to you both hugs and greetings,

After reading Christina's letter, a great relief came over me. What a pleasure to read and write in Spanish! Somehow the ghost of translation was limiting me from writing. I think for the more complex and emotional content I take more time and effort to find the correct English constructions. The experience of participating in the symposium was very important for me. Firstly, it was my first face-to-face conference after the Covid-confinement. I also left my comfortable research corner and managed to overcome the myth that if I didn't build up my presentation within what I consider 'traditional' academic parameters, I wouldn't have much to say. I was confronted with the evidence that my model of being academic is based on striving to distance myself from the personal. This is strange, because the literary analysis of novels, short stories and comics are very personal opinions or perspectives even if they are wrapped in and sustained by academic conventions. Another reason why I consider this experience essential was because it became clear to me that I had come out of the exhaustion of 2020, then I had reached my limits within university's numerical productivity. As a result, I experienced a decrease in my engagement and enthusiasm. I consider it a sign of recovery to have been able to participate in the symposium and talk openly about these tensions. In Roskilde I discovered that my state of mind and my strength were back.

I read Breny's text with admiration. I was not familiar with Christina's way of thinking, and it puzzled me. But Breny provided me with an aerial view, that not only clarified the steps to be followed in

Christina's analysis, I could also understand that getting involved in the analysis ended up involving me in an unexpected self-analysis. I then understood and it explained the moments of discomfort, that grew out of my reading.

My work with stories made me pay attention to details in both Christina's and Breny's texts. Despite of you addressing the same topic, I noticed differences. Breny added details to the text that helped to better understand Christina's text

Another detail that struck me in Breny's text was the way in which she, in addition to addressing the case, Christina's analysis and adding her critical notes, also -as part of the dialogue with the text - tells us about a similar experience of privilege and asymmetrical relations that she came to think about while reading. In my opinion she thereby not only sustained the dialogue regarding the theoretical approach but also opens the door to involve similar feelings. This involvement as a reader seems essential to me since it adds a new element to the interpretation.

In the selection from your book Christina, there are aspects that have impacted me and moved me to reflection. To begin with, the certainty with which you conceive work and research as a collective process: "In my understanding, knowledge production is always co-created and communication always dialogical." You argue that the different phases in an analytical process: readings, theorization and then analysis can be carried out collectively. These observations lead me to reflect on the way I do and conceive my own work and I must confess that it is fundamentally an individual process.

I only worked collectively during my three years at another faculty and was fascinated by the way Christina includes the need for collective labor in processes that I think of as individual. And then again what strikes me is the possibility of extending the analysis to those who investigate: the researcher herself and this possibility of self-analysis when working with a text keeps dazzling me while it also worries me a bit.

Finally, a general reflection regarding the active participation of the researcher and her dilemmas when constructing otherness. How does this

process work when otherness - at least who is theoretically considered as such - is the one who does the analysis? For example, when I analyze novels about the Andean world, I read familiar expressions, I recognize close descriptions, they are almost home perspectives. What are the dilemmas that a literate otherness face? And I think of Spivak's observation (Spivak, 1988) that when the subordinate occupies privileged places (place of enunciation as academic) she ceases to be so. A theme for reflection (Churampi, 2009). This is what I've managed to 'cook' so far. A huge hug full of affection, Adriana

Dear Adriana and Christina,

To begin with, sharing those days in Denmark was sweet and warm. They will remain in the repertoire of my most pleasant memories. And now embarking on this collaborative process of writing over time is novel to me, potentially loving, and at the same time perhaps even rugged. Anyway, I've done my homework. I re-read the pages from the book indicated by Christina, Adriana's text, and Christina's letter.

Reading Adriana's text, I realized that she had actually lived part of the memory that Christina evoked because GALF was an organization to which she had belonged in her formative political years. In my case, I construct my presence in Christina's memory. I inserted myself into her story imaginatively. That maybe made some difference at the level of the affects involved. However, it has been interesting for me to think about the dilemma that Adriana presents, about how to approach Christina's text either as an academic in her analytical practice or as the person who is rooted in the history of otherness. After thinking about it for a while, I think that in the end this separation is superficial or tenuous because no theoretical perspective can be exempt from the place of enunciation and the structure of feelings with which one is in the world. It is rather than a question of form. It is a matter of writing style or of the decisions we make when we approach a text. And those decisions have consequences. That's why when I re-read the texts, I remembered my initial reaction to

Christina's chapters. She had half-jokingly asked me not to emphasize the decolonial perspective too much. Do you remember? I took that warning very seriously and tried to suppress a decolonial analysis but was not entirely convinced that I should. For this reason, after reading and re-reading the text, I can now admit that I also felt the uneasiness that Adriana talks about with Christina's theoretical framework. Maybe for different reasons or maybe they are the same? One is that I hardly work with the concept of 'difference' so central to Christina. I believe that the question of otherness or difference is a problem that Europeans consider pivotal, in particular, poststructuralists not only do they use the concept to de-stabilize their power relationship towards colonial subjects but also to disengage from their own position of power. Which tacitly constitutes a denial of its power and its re-constitution. What a problem for me!

I also always found it interesting that poststructuralists raise the question of otherness while such Others have developed their own theories in response to their being positioned as Other. Think of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) or the critical theory of race (Crenshaw, 1996) black feminism (Hill Collins, 2000, bell hooks, 1994) postcolonial and decolonial perspectives (Mohanty 1997, Mendoza 2014) etc. However, they almost never carried out a conversation with them because, despite everything, poststructuralists liked to talk about the Other, but not with her. On the other hand, the being that embodied the so-called Otherness, although she was fully aware that she was perceived solely in terms of otherness from the colonial abyss that she inhabited, she never lost sight of her self-perception as a being in herself. She was always aware of being split off - in the way Du Bois describes it with his concept of double-consciousness (1993)- or Maldonado-Torres with 'the coloniality of being' (2007) - that is, in a perpetual struggle for her own self-definition and recognition as a human being.

In short, I entered this endeavor with another theoretical baggage and my thoughts/feelings came from decolonial theory. At first, your text Christina seemed to me, a difficult passage to cross theoretically. Likewise, the emphasis you put on experience caused me a bit of discomfort

due to your strong attachment to the present, that is, your presentism. Although I have worked with this idea before, I conceive the experience as a very post-structuralist construct. Anyway, I thought that maybe by privileging experience it was difficult to elucidate the history in which the experience of the present is always subjected. The epigenetic mark of the colonial trauma inherited from generation to generation seemed to me to be even more invisible if we only hold ourselves to what is happening in the present, in front of our eyes, close to our ears. Privileging the present seemed to me then another way to hide the colonial that defines us as white, European and as non-Western beings in Otherness. But then Christina, you introduce intersectionality as a bridge between the poststructural, feminist position and the dialogue with the Other, and that safeguarded some of the problems of the general approach that I present here. But it is still curious that the concept of intersectionality always remained as one of the few concepts that can be rescued from the enormous theoretical creation of non-European feminists. The history of concepts is important; just as it is sometimes difficult for us to apply concepts to our realities that were thought for other processes and eras. In general, I was struck by the absence of quotations from texts that were written by non-Europeans, especially Latin Americans. One of the things that I remember having thought through the discussions that took place at the symposium and later, is perhaps the need to create new concepts that could better account for the self-critical process that you carry out with your very original methodology.

That is to say that by dealing with the work of your memories and allowing myself to be led by the hand by your desire to free yourself from the limitations that our stories impose and with your spirit of collaboration, I was able to meet you half-way. Today I would insist again that your theoretical-methodological proposal with the combination with precepts that come outside of poststructuralism such as action research and popular education that in my opinion were best developed in Latin America are the ones that neutralized in the end the imperial effects that for me are still preserved

within poststructuralist positions. And for that reason, the methodology that you have created is without a doubt very important politically. Anyway, this is what I wanted to share today with the desire to open more discussions. With love and admiration, Breny

The dialogue

We started the conversation online with a discussion where we told each other what points we had found interesting in our letters.

Breny: When I wrote my letter, I had not yet read Adriana's letter. In my response to Christina's letter, I mention that what still disturbed me a little was how I had left decolonial perspectives out of my analysis. Christina as you are somewhat married to post-structuralism, I am to decolonial theories, right? And precisely these perspectives, so central to my thinking, you had asked me to downplay, and I had put them somewhat aside. Do you remember, Christina?

Christina: Yes.

Breny: The interesting thing about all this is that despite knowing you for so long, I was not very aware of your intellectual academic work. So, when I read the chapters that you had asked me to read, I was surprised by what I found. Despite also having been strongly influenced by poststructural perspectives years ago and despite being familiar with poststructuralism I had to re-enter this way of thinking. What I didn't know was how passionately you think with this perspective. So, when I started reading the book, I was careful not to read through a decolonial critical gaze. I remember that I found the reading quite complex. I read the chapters and made several notes because I felt that I needed to understand what you were up to. That is why I began to break down the text and this is what Adriana captured. It was a super good exercise for me because I was able to understand what Christina wanted to do, and I was able to appreciate the methodology she offers.

Then one thing that caught my attention in your letter Christina is that I felt a bit like I didn't touch a nerve in you. Adriana touched a nerve, but not me. You basically address Adriana, and you use me to make some point you yourself wanted to make. It made me feel ignored you know!

Christina: But I didn't want to ignore anyone! I realized that I had already written too much and that I had to finish the letter. But you are right, imbalances in participation when it comes to collaboration and voice are always interpreted and points to the fact that everything that one chooses to leave out constructs meaning.

Breny: Yes, it has consequences! Another observation is that when I read Adriana's letter, I realized that my relationship with Christina's stories was a little different than Adriana's. I know the world that Christina describes from Peru, but I am not a direct participant in her stories, as is Adriana being a former member of GALF. I gather that this has very different consequences for the process of interpretation and the affective relation to the text.

The last thing that caught my attention is that Christina in her letter asks you about how it made you feel reading her analysis. If you felt 'othered'. But when you write your letter you don't really give her an answer. I felt that Christina was very concerned about your possible reactions to the text.

Christina: She is ignoring me (*all laugh*).

Breny: That's why it made me think about how conversations don't have a directionality. They are very erratic. Every time you sit down to write something, what you write depends on what's on your mind at that very moment. And we don't get to know what you think Adriana because you don't answer directly. You do address the question about otherness, but very subtly.

Adriana: Your text impressed me a lot, Breny. Because when I first read my chapter, I was disoriented. I began to analyze the memory that Christina uses as an example and between bumps and

stumbles I managed to give a first opinion. But it was when I read your text Breny that I really understood what Christina had done and how her approach should be understood. Breny's text reinforced that intuition and the personal dimension that had disturbed me, and I understood that this was actually part of the objective of the analysis.

I was moved by that detailed addition that you make Breny when you share a memory of your own about difference and privilege evoked by the story in the chapter on intersectionality. It was a fabulous discovery for me to see how your story enriches the analysis and even adds new functions to it, such as allowing you to speak of healing as part of knowledge production.

About the excerpt taken from your book Christina, I am still impressed by how you so assertively think that all academic knowledge is co-produced. So, when you say that not only the interpretation, but several of the research phases can be and is done in dialogue, my reaction is; Wow! It inspires me to experiment more with collaborative analysis and with the integration of the researcher into the analysis even if it is quite disturbing as it can be perceived as a kind of undressing in public. All too often we move within the fiction of distance and objectivity.

Christina: Let me begin with Breny's letter - there were many things that touched me but one of the things that seem strongest to me is when you mention that many times gender trumps race in feminist analyzes. An important reason why I asked you for a gentle reading of my chapters is that I am aware that my analyzes lack profound knowledge and critical reflections on race. I was afraid that I was going to be 'undressed in public' as Adriana says. I certainly lack a decolonial perspective. I was afraid to be met with the sentence: 'Go home and do your homework.' I consider that phrase a discourse that closes a dialogue immediately. It is very strong and, in my opinion, often paralyzing. At the same time, I was extremely curious to hear your reading Breny and learn from it. I thought your presentation was great precisely because it showed that it is impossible to understand what happens in our construction of

memories about difference without taking in race and coloniality.

Breny: What I think now about this collaborative adventure is that we are three people from different places, and we have talked very little about that. Two of us have been historically, intellectually and academically, othered, and that has a strong weight in everything we are talking about. And you, Christina, having a different position - you are the European representative, the white one, - although you are not from the Empire, right? Despite coming from a small Scandinavian country, you end up representing 'the colonial'. Each one of us has a tremendous historical burden. Even if Adriana and I come from the same story, it is not the same, right? Because I am not Peruvian, and I come from a much more impoverished and smaller country with less symbolic power compared to Peru. I also experienced being a foreigner in Peru. That I had lived in Germany made a difference, but the fact that I was Honduran immediately put me in disadvantage. The different positions we talk from should not be completely lost in our article. Deep down they are present. Therefore you, with some anxiety ask Adriana that question about othering and that is why I question your insistence and emphasis on thinking about 'difference'. It's not that I don't think we should look at difference, but I have another sensitivity towards that concept. Because it seems to me that the fundamental problem of humanity is precisely that this concept obtained such a very powerful position and importance in the colonial context, from which and for the first time in history two-thirds of humanity are defined as truly without the status of human beings. And that is still the historical drama. My story and Adriana's are very determined by the European expansion and even our geopolitical position. And there is no escape from that, even though we both live outside Latin America. We have certain privileges as we live in the belly of the beast today.

Christina: When I in my analysis try to show how I construct otherness at the same time I try to show that this takes place in a double movement of trying to belong to the social in Peru.

Breny: Of course, that double movement is part of it, white, brown and black lives are entangled, but you mention it in just one line. I imagine very well, how you, the European, the white woman in Peru, desire to be accepted by others.

Christina: It's true I haven't been able to escape from the category of the ignorant gringa.

Breny: And there are other images from which we cannot escape, and neither can we deny that within the Latin American context, mestiza or the Euro-South American context there is a reproduction of forms of colonial power. I remember my experience in Peru. It was shocking to hear the white Peruvians referring to the indigenous Peruvians. They said horrible things.

Christina: That is why crossing differences in collaboration processes is not an easy thing. Every moment of the collaboration implies processes of omission and dominance - the methods I propose are to be able to talk about the embedded tensions and understand that security and trust must be built attending to these tensions. As I see it evocation opens a space of shared humanity, and the power of the affective dimension is brought into play in those situations as are our personal stories.

Adriana: When addressing my own difficulties in understanding the meaning of Christina's performance I also experienced some sadness because of the lost opportunity to enrich our daily interaction then among the different members of GALF. I felt frustrated because only decades later I understood that I had missed the symbolic meaning of the performance because I read it as an expression of Christina's cultural traditions and as such strange to us as Peruvians. And I didn't even ask her for more information about it. A lost opportunity!!

Breny: That affective part seems important to me in collaboration. Because it is true that, for example, I have a lot of affection for Christina, I have known her for so long and there is like an affective

current that colors everything. Adriana, I met you through Christina, and the affection that I feel there is between you, I have felt immediately. So, I think that in some way it is also mediating an open environment that influences the way we talk and exchange ideas.

Christina: There is a nexus between research and friendship. Male bonding and friendship is something that also maintains power in academia, although it is not talked about much.

Breny: No, and why not? I think it's very important. Returning a little to the point about whether knowledge is produced through individualized or collaborative work. I think that even if we work individually, in our imaginary we are always talking with a community, there is dialogue or perhaps not directly as we are living it now, but there always is. Look closely at our thought processes we are always talking to someone. There is no way for one to be monologic. But as we talk now, I feel that the conversation itself is very different from writing. Other things are said, other things are felt. And one does not reflect in the same way as you do when you write.

Christina: Establishing a conversation allows you to work with a lot of unfinished ideas and it allows you to make mistakes.

Adriana: That is true. For me to speak of a situation in which I don't feel 100 per cent safe is to show a degree of weakness that you should not allow yourself if you want to protect your status. For the first time I allowed myself to appear before an audience and say: This has cost me a lot, actually I had problems and entered a crisis. Saying this was new for me and it was a new experience to gain strength from that. It probably has to do with all the experiences I've had in the academy, right? As a Latin American woman in Western academy, you must perform not double but triple to be recognized and guaranteed your place of work - your space. This was a new experience of showing vulnerability and insecurity which at the same time created strength and important insights.

Arriving at a closure – on affect and difference in collaboration

All processes of collaboration imply endless interpretation and meaning-making. Alongside the process affects and relations are continuously (re) produced. We would like to close our assemblage with some brief reflections on affect. As you can see our collaborative experiment was moved by intense and subtle moments of subjectification, ideas of social belonging and our desires to change the world into a better and more just place for all. All human processes which co-produce affect. What stands out strongly closing this adventure is the way in which affect was a vital motor in our experiment, where we work across differences in social position, work situation, language, race, geopolitical situatedness etc. It was mutual trust, respect, friendship, and our joyful encounter at the symposium that made us want to enter the adventure in the first place. We are sure that our process, content, and tone would have been different if the positive feelings in our relationship had not facilitated the process. It allowed openness and self-interrogation, and we passed through unexpected topics and established connections between topics that had not been related before. Our feelings for each other contributed to our being able to keep open the conversation.

To work across power differences often create tensions and conflict. In our case we only briefly insinuate the *affective tensions* related to difference in power positions to be found in our text. In Breny's letter she writes that she feels somewhat ignored by Christina, Adriana systematically seems to overlook Christina's question about othering and Christina circles around her fear of harsh reactions from her friends when it comes to her way of thinking about race and difference. To dare to pose the uncomfortable questions about difference and power is vital to discover the perspectives of the so-called other and to explore the normative connections between the meanings that guide our taken-for-granted thinking.

Arriving at a closure we hope to have demonstrated how a small collaborative process set in motion by an academic encounter can pinpoint

the importance of positive affects in research processes, how tension exists, how relevant questions emerges and how trust can open up to conversations about difficult topics and refine practices of

relational ethics allowing urgent conversations to flourish in research which involve different life conditions and life experiences.

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