

World Engaging with Decolonial Feminist Praxis within Academia: Narratives from Colombia *Profunda*

Giovana Possignolo

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

giovana.possignolo@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

Abstract:

This study weaves together three movements of a Colombian feminist's decolonial praxis. First, Rodríguez Castro engages with decolonial feminisms to dismantle colonial feminisms in Latin America. Second, the author reflects on the *sentipensante* commitment she uses to delve into rural places as a White-mestiza. Third, she forges dialogues with rural women and social leaders to intertwine politics of place with insurgencies spawned by rural women's experiences and to advocate their participation in post-conflict negotiations embedded in persistent violence.

Beschäftigung mit dekolonialer feministischer Praxis innerhalb der akademischen Welt: Erzählungen aus Kolumbien *profunda*

German Abstract:

Rodríguez Castros Werk verwebt drei Bewegungen, die aus ihrer dekolonialen Praxis hervorgehen. Erstens beschäftigt sie sich mit dekolonialen Feminismen, um koloniale Feminismen in Lateinamerika aufzubrechen. Zweitens reflektiert sie ihr *sentipensante* Engagement, das sie nutzt, um ländliche Orte als Weiße Mestize zu erkunden. Drittens führt sie Dialoge mit Landfrauen und sozialen Anführerinnen, um eine Politik des Ortes mit Aufständen von Landfrauen zu verbinden, und um deren Teilnahme an den von andauernder Gewalt begleiteten Post-Konflikt-Verhandlungen zu fördern.

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Giovana Possignolo

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

Rodríguez Castro, Laura: *Decolonial Feminisms, Power and Place: Sentipensando with Rural Women in Colombia*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 208 pages, 85,59 EUR. ISBN: 978-3-030-59440-4.

Decolonial Feminisms, Power and Place: Sentipensando with Rural Women in Colombia was published in 2020, two years after Colombian Laura Rodríguez Castro concluded her doctorate at an Australian University. This book is the result of the author's ongoing process of unlearning and learning with Colombian rural women and has emerged from a *compromiso sentipensante* (feeling-thinking commitment) combined with decolonial praxis with the aim of dismantling colonial feminisms. Colonial feminisms, as explained by Rodríguez Castro, are forms of Western feminist thought that homogenize feminist discourse thereby neglecting the plurality of women from different places and victimizing rural, Indigenous and Black Women from the Global South. The feeling-thinking commitment is the methodological choice of the author to incorporate emotional and thinking elements into her decolonial praxis. Her praxis complements research approaches, such as interviewing, photographing, forging dialogues, learning, and walking in the *veredas* (rural lands) with *Campesinas* (rural women) in Colombia.

Notwithstanding her efforts, Rodríguez Castro's engagement with decolonial praxis is entangled with her privileged position as an upper-middle class White-mestiza and researcher at an Australian university. However, she identifies herself as a 'Latina' immigrant in Global North Academia who faces precarious conditions in the academic labour market which she uses to embrace an anti-racist and decolonial standpoint that recognizes the ambiguity of immigrating to a place with a colonial past, such as Australia. Like Colombia, Australia's past is marked by White settler colonialism entailing the dispossession and oppression of Indigenous people. But unlike in Colombia, Australian universities are situated within the "English global knowledge system" (Roberts and Connell 2016 *apud* Rodríguez Castro, 2020, p. 176), which differentiates the country's geopolitics of knowledge in comparison to Colombia. However,

both countries face the ongoing expropriation of lands and bodies while alternative forms of livelihood together with nature (e.g. cosmovisions) resist, as Rodríguez Castro argues about rural Colombia.

By questioning her own biography and privileges and, mainly, by listening to rural women's testimonies of resistance (p. 3), Rodríguez Castro proposes a writing-practice process that engages with decolonial, anti-racist and feminist insurgencies through a participatory ethnographic work with the Colombian *Campesinas* – women from the countryside who identify themselves through their epistemic forces of place and struggle against patriarchal and neoliberal structures and persistent violence. By making herself visible, she critically reflects upon the binary logic embedded in knowledge production (Ch. 3).

Rodríguez Castro explains her aims through three interconnected projects, which she calls movements because they follow a non-linear logic and are interdependent. For example, dismantling colonial feminisms requires decolonial self-reflexive praxis and unlearning for *knowing with*. Both aims, however, urge listening and narrating herstories of marginalized women who experience the historical, economical, structural, and epistemic continuum of violence. Although Rodríguez Castro reflects non-linearly on these movements, the book is clearly structured to help the reader follow her process and decolonial praxis, and consists of five chapters with an introduction and a conclusion.

After introducing colonial feminisms and the colonial matrix of power and explaining her aims and projects (Ch. 1), Rodríguez Castro engages with decolonial and communitarian feminist activists in *Abya Yala* by reviewing the existing literature. She argues that these activists denounce epistemic violence embedded in colonial feminisms and dismantle the stereotypes and objectification of women from the Global South. Otherwise, she advocates women's agency, knowledge and relational forms of existing and resisting in marginalized contexts, such as rural Colombia.

The concept of politics of place as relational is crucial for Rodríguez Castro to follow very closely the ways in which Colombian *Campesinas* create places by transiting the *veredas*, their homes, and displacing them to the city (Ch. 4). The importance of *veredas* as rural communities' lived spaces refers to their power derived from the relational politics of place that enables these women to negotiate with state authorities (p. 92). Rodríguez Castro interweaves *Campesinas'*

lived experiences from two Colombian rural communities (Toca and Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta) to feel-think embodied, epistemic and experienced violence in these territories and the women's bodies (Ch. 5). The sixth chapter intertwines Lorena Cabnal's concept *territorio cuerpo-tierra* and testimonies of women leaders who denounce the colonial matrix of power in rural territories and propose other forms of world, thereby achieving food sovereignty and weaving feminisms from below (p. 170).

Finally, in the seventh and concluding chapter, Rodríguez Castro brings together the book's main arguments, emphasizing a *sentipensante* compromise and the meaning of "epistemic forces of place" (pp. 176–9). For her, this commitment entails knowledge production from an open and relational process, being aware of epistemic violence and reflexive about the ambiguities of the power relations embedded in an academic position in the Global North.

For those committed to the exploration of decolonial, anti-racism and feminist insurgencies, the book provides several tools and methodological choices of engagement with decolonial praxis within neoliberal universities. The politics of citation, the epistemic forces of place, the making visible of writer's trajectories and privileges, and a feeling-thinking commitment demonstrate how decolonial and other projects can be committed to dismantling the coloniality of power and gender in academia (p. 175).

Rodríguez Castro recognises the limitations of a PhD thesis, and thus, certain issues remain unexplored in her work. Although Rodríguez Castro's feeling-thinking commitment aims at dismantling colonial feminisms, it can be questioned whether Colombian *Campesinas* and rural women leaders' agency are in full agreement with decolonial theories and praxis developed in an academic context. The publication would also enrich decolonial debates even more if Rodríguez Castro explored how the rural women's cosmovisions could enlarge the debate and politics of place for decolonizing academia.

To sum up, Rodríguez Castro work is a valuable contribution to the research on rural Latin America and is committed to dismantling heteropatriarchy in rural debates and urges *Campesinas'* participation in post-peace accord negotiations in Colombia. She also inspires practices to make visible and denounce elitist and epistemic violence from within the academies of the Global North. Her feeling-thinking commitment inspires and provides

possibilities of decolonizing the academic world from the very beginning of our place and reflexivity.