



Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui on the Dilemmas of Representation in Postcolonial and Decolonial Feminisms

Author(s): Kiran Asher

Source: *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3, Decolonial and Postcolonial Approaches: A dialogue (2017), pp. 512-524

Published by: Feminist Studies, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.15767/feministstudies.43.3.0512>

Accessed: 10-01-2018 15:41 UTC

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.15767/feministstudies.43.3.0512?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Feminist Studies, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Feminist Studies*

KIRAN ASHER

Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui on the Dilemmas of Representation in Postcolonial and Decolonial Feminisms

I have no doubt that we must *learn* to learn from the original practical ecological philosophers of the world, through slow, attentive, mind-changing (on both sides), ethical singularity that deserves the name of “love.”

—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak¹

There can be no discourse of decolonization, no theory of decolonization, without a decolonizing practice.

—Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui²

ALTHOUGH I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN INDIA, I have been doing research on and in Latin America for more than half my life. The monkey of British colonialism peers over one shoulder, that of Ibero-American settler colonialism over the other. The journey from Asia to the Americas broadly coincided with the shifts in my training from the natural to the social sciences. Feminisms of various stripes helped me navigate

-
1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories by Mahasweta Devi* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 200–201 (emphasis in original).
 2. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “*Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2012): 100.

the unacknowledged but busy traffic between nature and culture, most famously invoked by Donna Haraway in *Primate Visions*.³

In the past few decades, nature and culture, mediated by gender, have also become central to the lexicons of social and environmental movements across the world. They have been particularly visible in Indigenous and Afro-descendant struggles for ethnic rights and claims to ancestral lands in Latin America. Scholars and activists influenced to varying degrees by postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist critiques of modernity contend that such movements oppose the current neoliberal phase of globalization and the Eurocentric, capitalist modernity it represents. For example, advocates of so-called postdevelopment and certain ecofeminists blame mainstream development for degrading the environment and impoverishing vulnerable populations by destroying their livelihoods.⁴ They emphasize how the traditional practices of such communities and the experiences of those situated outside Europe contain possibilities of sustainable and just alternatives to development, in which nature and culture are tightly bound and not separate as they are in Western modernity. A focus on subaltern resistance and subjugated knowledge, particularly of so-called Third World women and Indigenous peoples, has become a central feature of postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship and advocacy.

It is beyond the scope of this commentary to review the multiple variants of postcolonial and decolonial feminisms and the many ways in which they converge and diverge.⁵ My task here is to engage with certain key elements of the work of two important scholars: Gayatri Chakravorty

-
3. Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
 4. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival* (London: Zed Books, 1988).
 5. There is an extensive and now well-known body of feminist postcolonial scholarship. The works of Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty cited here are among some that are key to it. Their work also informs decolonial feminisms. However, Mohanty draws more on intersectional analysis of settler colonial practices and experiences in the Americas. See Marcelle Maese-Cohen, "Introduction: Toward Planetary Decolonial Feminisms," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18, no. 2 (2010): 3–27; and Breny Mendoza, "Coloniality of Gender and Power: From Postcoloniality to Decoloniality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Spivak and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. Spivak is well known (and sometimes denounced) in the Anglo-American academy and beyond as a postcolonial critic and Marxist feminist scholar of deconstruction. Her essays on representation, subaltern subject formation, and struggles for justice beyond law implicitly and explicitly speak to postcolonial and decolonial concerns.⁶ The Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui is rather less known in the Anglo-American academy. However, her writing on peasant unions and Andean ayllu (traditional Quechua and Aymara communities) as well as her work as part of the Taller de Historia Oral Andina (Andean Oral History Project) and her critique of Western liberalism have been key in drawing attention to indigeneity in Bolivian development and resistance.⁷ Her critical work on the experience of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous women calls for decolonizing the Latin American left and Latin American feminisms.⁸ In recent years, this work has been translated into English and has become available to non-Spanish-reading audiences.⁹

As the editors of the volume *Translocalities/Translocalidades: The Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Américas* note, "Translation

-
6. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Responsibility," *boundary 2* (1994): 19–64; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Righting Wrongs — 2002: Accessing Democracy among the Aboriginals," in her *Other Asias* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 14–57; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012).
 7. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "Liberal Democracy and Ayllu Democracy in Bolivia: The Case of Northern Potosí," *Journal of Development Studies* 26 (1990), 97–121.
 8. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "La noción de 'derecho' o las paradojas de la modernidad postcolonial: indígenas y mujeres en Bolivia," *Temas Sociales: Revista de Sociología UMSA* 19 (1997), 27–52. In 1997, Rivera Cusicanqui along with Rossana Barragán translated the key works of Indian postcolonial historiography by the subaltern studies group into Spanish.
 9. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, "The Notion of 'Rights' and the Paradoxes of Postcolonial Modernity: Indigenous Peoples and Women in Bolivia," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 18 (2010): 29–54; Rivera Cusicanqui, "Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection," 95–109.

is politically and theoretically indispensable to forging feminist, prosocial justice; antiracist, postcolonial/decolonial, and anti-imperial political alliances.”¹⁰ Deploying translation figuratively, the contributors to the volume trace the multidirectional travels of feminist theories in the Americas and highlight the many complications of forging alliances. For example, Ana Rebeca Prada reflects on the difficulties of literally and politically translating Gloria Anzaldúa’s ideas in Bolivia, given the untranslatability of the US category “women of color” in Latin America.¹¹ These difficulties are evident when feminist scholars engage with the writings of Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui. Neither claims to be a “postcolonial” or “decolonial” feminist per se. Nevertheless, their writings on subalternity and indigeneity are regularly and justifiably cited in reference to postcolonial and decolonial feminisms. But what these invocations often fail to note is that both scholars caution against a simple endorsement of the anti-Eurocentric authority of subaltern women or Indigenous communities. Both, albeit differently, engage in and invite a persistent critique of Eurocentrism, imperialism, capitalism, nationalism, and their representational practices. Both grapple with the thorny matter of representing subalternity and indigeneity, not only in Eurocentric scholarship, but also by migrant and diasporic academics and national elites. In this commentary, I foreground how Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui’s persistent critiques of representation are imperative because they further postcolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship and call for dialogues between them. Like translations, such dialogues entail reaching across linguistic, historical, and geographical boundaries to build political and theoretical bridges in an attempt to connect decolonial and postcolonial divides.

-
10. Sonia E. Alvarez, Claudia de Lima Costa, Verónica Feliu, Rebecca Hester, Norma Klahn, and Millie Thayer with Cruz C. Bueno, eds., introduction to their *Translocalities/Translocalidades: Feminist Politics of Translation in the Latin/a Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 2.
 11. Ana Rebeca Prada, “Is Anzaldúa Translatable in Bolivia?” in *Translocalities/Translocalidades*, 57–77.

THE DILEMMAS OF REPRESENTATION
IN POSTCOLONIAL AND DECOLONIAL FEMINISMS

Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, and the feminisms associated with them, are marked by diverse genealogies and histories and emerge from multiple locations. None of them can be spoken of in the singular. What they have in common is that they are anticolonial in at least two ways: first, they foreground how colonial practices constituted the modern world and the Eurocentric forms of knowledge production that marginalize other forms of knowing and being in the world. Second, they concur that the political task of working toward liberation, decolonization, and social justice must accompany scholarly and academic tasks of analysis.

This is as far as the agreement goes. Wide-ranging debates rage around fundamental questions: How do “postcolonial critiques” and “decolonial praxis” contribute to struggles for social and environmental justice? How do current struggles for liberation and justice link to past struggles, to anticapitalist, antiracist, and feminist struggles? Who are the subjects of resistance and change? How should one account for different kinds of colonial practices and the specificities of each? How do the experiences of marginalized peoples and invisibilized epistemes inform decolonization struggles? How do “Third World women,” “women of color,” “Indigenous communities,” “First Nations,” migrant and diasporic peoples and their knowledges shape postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist scholarship and practices? Such questions are the proper concerns of both postcolonial and decolonial critics and activists. The lack of a consensus on their relative priorities (within the two camps as well as between them) reflects the vitality of ongoing debates. Any true understanding of the complexity of colonial power relations — in their present manifestations and the related anticolonial project — cannot privilege a single perspective or locus of struggle.

The issue of representation is at the heart of postcolonial feminist critiques.¹² The term “postcolonial” does not refer to the period after the end of formal colonialism, but to a set of theoretical and political positions. The postcolonial problematic draws attention to forms of

12. There is an extensive and now well-known body of postcolonial feminist scholarship that informs my overview. The works of Spivak, cited above, and Mohanty, cited below, are among some that are key to it.

knowledge that were brought into being during the *longue durée* of colonial rule and that continue into the present. Colonial scholarship or discourses (texts, practices, and institutions) represent colonial subjects as “backward” and the world in simple binaries such as the West/the rest, modernity/tradition, civilized/barbaric, and so on. These representations are seen as always-already existing (universal, essential) and, thus, erase any traces of colonial presence and intervention (ethnocentrism/Eurocentrism).

Postcolonial scholarship draws analytically on poststructural insights, but it differs from the latter in that colonial power and practices are seen as constitutive of Western modernity. Of the various and debated lessons of the postcolonial critiques, two specific but interrelated meanings of representation are crucial to this commentary. The first refers to representation as the constitution or production of the subjects and objects of intervention, and the second refers to representation as speaking for or on behalf of marginalized or subaltern subjects.

Spivak’s work represents one important, though by no means the only, variant of postcolonial thought. Among its other accomplishments, it highlights how the problem of representation is linked to problems of relations: between the West and the rest, the metropole and the colony, rural and urban, capital and culture, aboriginal and national culture, Western philosophy/science and Indigenous knowledge/episteme. In her deconstructive approach, relations are not just oppositional, and representation is both a necessity and an impossibility. Thus, even radical critics must be constantly vigilant about how the objects of their analysis, critique, or alternative politics are produced, including by the critics themselves as investigating subjects. This is different from simple self-reflexivity or strategic essentialism in that there is no possibility of “good” representation and no space “outside” relations.

This is the difficult argument Spivak puts forth in her 1988 essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Importantly, it cannot be misread as a call to recuperate the *agency* of subaltern subjects. As Rosalind Morris notes, the problematic or aporia of representation — as an impossibility and a necessity in colonialism, capitalism, and feminism — is a thread that runs through all of Spivak’s work, from “Can the Subaltern Speak?” to

her 2012 *An Aesthetic Education in the Age of Globalization*.¹³ Remark-
ing on Spivak's relentless antipositivist critique and her warning against
essentialism, Drucilla Cornell writes,

Once we come to terms with the inevitability of representation, both
in terms of ideals and people involved in political struggle, then we
must, and the *must* here is the ethical moment, confront how we are
shaping others through those representations so as to reinforce the
images and fantasies of the colonial as well as the not-yet-decolo-
nized imaginary.¹⁴

That the "we" who must be attentive to the ethical moment includes
postcolonial critics is clear from Spivak's trenchantly blunt statement in
The Critique of Postcolonial Reason:

The current mood, in the radical fringe of humanistic Northern ped-
agogy, of uncritical enthusiasm for the Third World, makes a demand
upon the inhabitant of the Third World to speak up as an authentic
ethnic fully representative of his or her tradition. This demand in
principle ignores an open secret: that an ethnicity untroubled by the
vicissitudes of history and neatly accessible as an object of investiga-
tion is a confection to which the disciplinary pieties of the anthropol-
ogist, the intellectual curiosity of the early colonials and the Euro-
pean scholars partly inspired by them, *as well as* the indigenous elite
nationalists, by way of the culture of imperialism, contributed their
labors, and the (proper) object (of investigation) is therefore "lost."¹⁵

A less dense articulation of this idea with respect to migrant aca-
demics engaging US multiculturalism is found in *Imaginary Maps*, Spi-
vak's translation of Mahasweta Devi's short stories, which highlight
the experiences of aborigines in India. Spivak urges, "We must *learn* to
learn from the original practical ecological philosophers of the world."¹⁶
However, both in the translator's preface and in the afterword of *Imagi-
nary Maps*, Spivak warns against an uncritical recovery of non-Western

-
13. Rosalind Morris, introduction to *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
 14. Drucilla Cornell, "The Ethical Affirmation of Human Rights: Gayatri Spivak's Intervention," in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, 100 (emphasis in original).
 15. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 60 (italics in original).
 16. Spivak, *Imaginary Maps*, 201.

subjectivity and essentialist accounts of Indigenous knowledge about nature. For example, in her remarks on interdisciplinary feminist research on “Third World women,” she reminds academics and intellectuals of their role within the political economy of knowledge production.¹⁷ She notes that the subject (“the investigator”) and the object (the women being “investigated”) are located and linked very differently within the international division of labor.

The varied and differential colonial experiences of aborigines in the Americas—Indigenous and First Nations—undergirds the various strands of decolonial projects.¹⁸ Of these projects, the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) research collective is particularly critical of postcolonial theory, despite sharing much of its analysis and critique of Western or Eurocentric modernity.¹⁹ The MCD justifiably call the postcolonialism of Spivak (and other works emerging from South Asian subaltern history) to account for its inattention to the formative role of the conquest of the Americas and the racialized practices of settler colonialism in constituting Europe. For example, race and place form the focal point of MCD thought and its analysis of the “coloniality of power” and the modern world-system.²⁰ The MCD rejects the critique and deconstruction of what they call “the postcolonial canon” associated with Spivak and others. MCD members further

-
17. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Political Economy of Women as Seen by a Literary Critic,” in *Coming to Terms: Feminism, Theory, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Weed (New York: Routledge, 2012), 218–29.
 18. Decolonial thinking emerges from the writings and activism of Chicanas and other women of color in the United States, First Nation people in the United States, and especially in Canada, Zapatista struggles in southern Mexico, Afro-Latino and Indigenous ethnic and territorial struggles in coastal or lowland areas of Central and South America, the struggles of Andean (Aymara and Quecha) peasants and Indigenous communities in South America, and more. Thus, there are many strands of decolonial thinking even within Latin American decolonial thought. See for instance Xochitl Leyva Solano “Walking and Doing: About Decolonial Practices,” trans. Joanne Rappaport, *Collaborative Anthropologies* 4 (2011): 119–38.
 19. I offer a detailed review of the MCD’s work and ideas in Kiran Asher, “Latin American Decolonial Thought, or Making the Subaltern Speak,” *Geography Compass* 7 (2011): 832–42.
 20. See the contributions in Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, Carlos A. Jáuregui, eds., *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and in the special issue of the journal *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007).

claim that their critiques and proposals of liberation emerge from the cosmovisions of exploited and marginal groups.

María Lugones, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Margara Millan Moncayo, among others, fundamentally expand decolonial scholarship by tracing how colonial racial and economic power relations were and remain profoundly gendered.²¹ A key aspect of their contribution to decolonial thinking and feminisms is that there is no singular view of gender or how it intersects with multiple axes of power, including those of race, place, class, and sex.

Various feminists and feminisms—Third World, women of color, black, transnational, intersectional, multicultural—have sought to analyze and foreground these different gendered and raced experiences.²² They have also sought to articulate more liberatory or decolonializing practices. It is within this context that Rivera Cusicanqui’s writings on Bolivian peasants and Indigenous communities is increasingly invoked in reference to Latin American decolonial feminist thought.

Rivera Cusicanqui does not speak to or of decolonialism or feminisms as such. Rather, across her work, she traces how cultural differences in Bolivia are configured and change within changing colonial, national, and political economic contexts. While calling for a need to foreground the importance of indigeneity in Latin American history and politics, she warns, “The discourse of multiculturalism and the discourse of hybridity are essentialist and historicist interpretations of the indigenous question.”²³ Like Spivak’s critique of postcolonial reasoning, Rivera Cusicanqui is blunt in her condemnation of certain strands of decolonial and cultural studies scholarship:

21. Some key works include Mara Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender,” in *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar (New York: Routledge, 2010), 369–90; Margara Millan Moncayo, “Feminismos, postcolonialidad, decolonizacion: Del centro a los Margenes?” *Andamios* 8 (2011): 11–36; and the works of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui.

22. From the work of Cherre Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, the Combahee River Collective Statement, and other black feminist writing in the 1980s to recent work on decolonial feminism, there is an extensive range of work from women and feminists across the world and across fields that contributes to disrupting unitary or essential visions of womanhood and explores how sex/gender, race, and other inextricably linked identities and power relations shape subjectivity and experiences of women.

23. Rivera Cusicanqui, “*Ch’ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection*,” 100.

I believe that the multiculturalism of [Walter] Mignolo and company neutralizes the practices of decolonization by enthroning within the academy a limited and illusory discussion regarding modernity and decolonization. Without paying attention to the internal dynamics of the subalterns, cooptations of this type neutralize. They capture the energy and availability of indigenous intellectuals – brothers and sisters who may be tempted to play the ventriloquist of a convoluted conceptualization that deprives them of their roots and their dialogues with the mobilized masses.²⁴

She is equally skeptical of the vicissitudes of “neoliberal multiculturalism,” remarking that the official forms of recognizing cultural difference since 1990 are such that,

the indigenous people of the east and west are imprisoned in their *tierras comunitarias de origen* (original communal lands) and are NGOized, essentialist and Orientalist notions become hegemonic, and the indigenous people are turned into multicultural adornment for neoliberalism.²⁵

Among the dangers of neoliberal multiculturalism as window dressing is that it deprives Indigenous communities of “their potentially hegemonic status and their capacity to affect the state.”²⁶ Thus, while scathingly critical of the state (including Evo Morales’s government), Rivera Cusicanqui, like Spivak, rejects the condition of subalternity for Indigenous communities, as that would mean denial of the possibility of access to the benefits of citizenship. Her decolonizing practice differs from that of the MCD in that she does not reject the state and development *in toto*. Rather, like Spivak, her political economic analysis focuses on how various entities — national elites, scholars, (male) union and community leaders, Bolivian feminist (*mestiza*) activists, and Indigenous women — are positioned differently within the international division of labor of global capitalism.

In *The Notion of “Rights” and the Paradoxes of Postcolonial Modernity: Indigenous Peoples and Women in Bolivia*, Rivera Cusicanqui documents the crucial but often invisible cultural and economic labor of

24. Ibid., 104.

25. Ibid., 99.

26. Ibid.

Indigenous women in Bolivia. She highlights how Indigenous women played key roles in labor union organizing, ethnic and territorial struggles, and political movements that led to the election of Evo Morales, the first Indigenous president in South American history, and to the formulation of the 2009 constitution, which grants unprecedented rights to Indigenous communities. She notes that these contributions are not seen or represented by the states, Indigenous organizations, or Bolivian feminists. There are many parallels here with my work on Afro-Colombian women's organizing, where the essential role of women in the struggle for ethnic and territorial rights was often invisible to mainstream feminists and black activists.²⁷

Indigenous women too often fall through the cracks of the shifting terrains of class, ethnic, and cultural politics. For example, women migrants doing domestic work in urban areas are treated as "Indigenous" and earn less than the normal minimal wage. However, they are designated as *mestizas* and thus denied access to Indigenous rights. By highlighting the contradictions and dilemmas of Indigenous women's identity and work, Rivera Cusicanqui's writing helps complicate discussions about how Indigenous women contribute to decolonial futures. Within the context of this commentary, I want to flag her call to Bolivian feminists to question their representation of domestic labor as naturally feminine and their lack of engagement with indigeneity. She also calls on ethnic organizations to pay attention to the gendered identities and needs of Indigenous migrant women, who may not couch or access their rights in territorial terms. As she notes in her conclusion,

The implicit corollary to this entire argument points to the need for a simultaneous decolonization of both gender and indigeneity, of the quotidian and the political, by way of a theory and a practice that links alternative and pluralist notions of citizenship rights with rights inhering in traditional indigenous laws and customs, as much in legislation as in the everyday and private practices of the people.²⁸

Her notion of decolonization neither rests on essentialist notions of the Indigenous or woman (and their relations to nature and culture) nor

27. Kiran Asher, *Black and Green: Afro-Colombians, Development, and Nature in the Pacific Lowlands* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

28. Rivera Cusicanqui, "The Notion of 'Rights,'" 51.

rejects the state. Rather it broadens the terrains of struggles of both and broadens the decolonial scholarship representing these struggles.

While critical of neoliberal economic globalization and corresponding multicultural politics, Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui's work invites equal vigilance about postcolonial and decolonial alternatives. Such vigilance means going beyond abstract or generalized representations of Indigenous people's material relations to nature and land to understand how past, present, and future nature-cultures are shaped within specific conjunctures of political economy, state policies, and cultural politics.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In her chapter "Under Western Eyes," Chandra Talpade Mohanty analyzes Western feminist writings on "Third World women" and suggests that they "discursively colonialize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'third world woman.'"²⁹ According to Mohanty, portrayals of Third World women as monolithic, impoverished victims of patriarchy and/or capitalist development minimize the fact that women become women not just vis-à-vis men but also vis-à-vis class, religious, racial, colonial, national, and other historical and political locations. This is not a point about the plurality among women or the heterogeneity of women's identities, as is commonly misunderstood. Rather, Mohanty's argument is that there is no a priori Third World woman: such women are discursively produced by recent Western feminism in a manner reminiscent of colonial practices.

Like Mohanty, Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui flag the pitfalls of colonial representations in postcolonial and decolonial feminisms. I argue that such pitfalls are also present in representations of postcolonial and decolonial feminisms. For example, the postcolonial feminist project is seen as "deconstructive," while the decolonial feminist one is thought of as "constructive." But to paraphrase Mohanty again,

29. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 53.

anticolonial feminisms engage both projects simultaneously.³⁰ The discussion here is but one entry point into ongoing and much needed dialogues between them. These dialogues are not easy, but as Rivera Cusicanqui urges us, we must cross the borders and construct

South-South links that will allow us to break the baseless pyramids of the politics and academies of the North and that will enable us to make our own science, in a dialogue among ourselves and with the sciences from our neighboring countries, by affirming our bonds with theoretical currents of Asia and Africa — that is, to confront the hegemonic projects of the North with the renewed strength of our ancestral convictions.³¹

She adds elsewhere that these tasks entail being attentive to the political economy of knowledge production. Spivak's notion of moving beyond neutral dialogues "to render visible the historical and institutional structures of the representative space" from which one is called on to speak supplements Rivera Cusicanqui's suggestions.³² In these remarks I have tried to show how they both prompt us — postcolonial and decolonial feminists alike — to reflect critically on our desires and methods to represent those outside Europe as we engage in anticolonial struggles.

The heretofore-marginalized knowledge of Indigenous and Third World peoples is central to imagining alternatives to colonial capitalism and to more just connections between humans and nature. But it is imperative to be cognizant of the pitfalls and problematics of representing this knowledge, that is, of the political economy of knowledge production in order to guard against simplistic claims about decolonial ontologies and postcolonial futures.

30. Ibid., 51.

31. Rivera Cusicanqui, "*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection*," 107.

32. Sarah Harasym, "Editor's Note," *The Post-Colonial Critic*, vii.