Peruvian Echoes, Diversions, and Struggles with *Not One Less*

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A few days ago, I was talking with the Peruvian scholar Alexandra Hibbett about the classic interlocutor (or ideal reader) of our academic writings. It would be some kind of anonymous male, impassive as a wall to which one speaks but who maintains a silent distance. We noticed that in this tradition in which we were educated, our writing acquired a certain rigidity that became increasingly difficult for us to cope with, since the horizon of our feminist practice moves us to another type of dialogue. We felt that another type of academic writing and other ideal readers were necessary for us. From this perspective, María Pia López's book *Not One Less* questions not only my situation as a Peruvian feminist living in New York, but also my academic writing practice.

My experience of reading *Not One Less* resonates with what López proposes as a different way of creating community through not only writing a chronicle of the Argentine feminist movement (especially Ni Una Menos) but also restoring the present moment and the body in her writing. As López points out, "Rejecting the notion of the mind as separate from the body, conceptual and abstract, I write from sensory experience, from the memories of humiliations and harm, the euphoria of a massive gathering, the power of the occupation of a street, the challenge of conflicting organizational practices."[1] I am especially struck by this idea of writing that comes from gathering, from a community. A sense of community is evident not only in López's creative process but also in its receptiveness to that ideal reader of our productions. A place that destabilizes the hierarchy of knowledge production and locates itself in a horizontal place of listening. A dialogue, instead of a one-way transmission. As Sara Ahmed has pointed out in *Living a Feminist Life*: "Feminism as a collective movement is made out of how we are moved to become feminists in dialogue with one another."[2]

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In this movement that takes writing from memory to experience—passing through the streets walked in protest—reflecting on the modes of influence, the multiple points of contact between the Argentinian movement and what has been happening with the situation of feminism in Peru during the last five years, is inevitable. From a Latin American perspective, it seems that Peru is the caboose of women's rights: one of the last countries of the region to recognize sexual and reproductive rights, with the road still long and difficult toward the recognition of marriage equality, of full justice for the victims of gender and sexual violence, and the right to abortion. In contrast with the contemporary situation in Peru, López highlights various Peruvian authors who have inspired feminist ideas. López refers to the work of Flora Tristán, a pioneer in the creation of workers' unions and in thinking about the links between gender and social class. This reflection on Flora Tristán helps López to point out the double neglect to which the female proletariat has been subjected, both by Marxism (which only speaks of the male one) and by feminism (which overlooks the working class).

We know that the impetus for the Ni Una Menos marches in Latin America emerged from the exceptional number of cases of gender violence. I participated in the beginning of the organization of this march in Peru, and it became necessary for us to contact colleagues from Argentina to learn from their experiences in order to have the greatest possible impact. In 2016, the case of Arlette Contreras came to light and generated a huge wave of outrage that resulted in this first march. We all could see, thanks to the camera at the hotel where Arlette spent a night with her ex-boyfriend, how she was running out of the room when he started attacking her. We all saw that moment that made us go back several millennia to the antiquity of the caves when man made her fall to the ground and dragged her several meters, grabbing her by the hair. Quite a modern troglodyte. Those images were so outrageous that a lot of people felt inspired to go to the streets. As a result, the march in August of 2016 was one of the largest in Lima's history. However, unlike what happened in Argentina, the Ni Una Menos march in Peru failed to articulate a real movement. The rescue that López made of the thought and activism of Flora Tristán, by focusing on the working class, seems essential to me to rethink Peruvian feminism. The oldest and most recognized feminist organizations in Peru are usually more connected to the middle class, NGOs, and universities, but not to popular organizations.

Seeing the "dawn of feminism in real time" (6), as López points out, is linked to a need and a hunger for community among women. During the Ni Una Menos march in Lima, an image stood out for me among the crowd of mobilized bodies, marching, shouting. There was a woman, probably in her fifties, standing alone on the sidewalks, watching the march pass in front of her. She wasn't walking, but she was next to a door—Was it her home? Her business?—and she carried a sign

that read: "I've always been alone, but now! I have a million friends." Beyond that million people walking, I have the vision of that lady and her poster: a powerful image that something was changing. That lady who no longer felt alone, perhaps facing a life of abuse that she would have endured alone, or perhaps she had felt that all those people could also walk by her side, that her loneliness was fading and there was another way to continue living. Who knows? But at that moment, she felt accompanied, she felt heard, she felt like she belonged to a community. At least for the hours the march lasted. This image reinforced for me the need to articulate the Peruvian feminist movement with the working-class one, as López emphasizes.

On the matter of reproductive and sexual rights, López highlights the forced sterilizations during Alberto Fujimori's regime: more than three hundred thousand women were sterilized without their consent, and to date they have not received justice. A few days ago, the first of the hearings on this case was about to be held, but it had to be suspended because no Quechua language interpreters could be found to assist the victims. This reveals the colonial roots of this double exclusion of Andean women, since the coordinates of race and class aggravate their gender situation. As López says, "We must consider the complexity of contemporary production of violence, taking into account the patriarchal relationship with racism and classism. . . . But we must keep in mind that there is a specific violence, incarnated as appropriation and denial of autonomy, directed toward the female body as something to be possessed or destroyed, a territory to be colonized" (36). This consideration by López opens the possibility of thinking about a transnational feminism. In its recognition of the intersections of racism and classism with gender, her conceptual framework invites the possibility of reflecting further on the Peruvian situation, of which the case of forced sterilizations is a clear example.

Another concrete example of the crossovers between gender, class, and race are the cases of sexual violence perpetrated during the years of the internal armed conflict in Peru (the 1980s and 1990s), when more than two thousand cases of sexual abuse were perpetrated by the military and the Shining Path terrorists. Most of these victims were Quechua-speaking Andean women, in a situation of constant vulnerability and precarity.

What López narrates of what happened in Argentina after the increase in the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights echoes the Peruvian case. After the collective outrage at the Ni Una Menos march, as cruel backlash, several women were burned by their boyfriends, ex-partners, or other relatives. In Argentina, the cruelty of gender violence worsened; in the Peruvian case, the patriarchy reacted by revolting with rage and using fire against women's bodies.

One of the classic slogans of feminist marches is "We are the granddaughters of witches you weren't able to burn," which rescues that tradition of fire that has historically marked us women. The motto is repeated in all countries, as a reminder

that our wishes represent the transgression of heteropatriarchy and that fire has been a way to contain us. And so, the green and purple tides advance, a scenario that is repeated in every Latin American country. But on one occasion—which perhaps could only happen precisely in Peru—I heard a macabre reply: "We are the sons of the inquisitors." I heard that infamous scream in Lima, at the beginning of August 2018. While the law to decriminalize abortion was being debated in Argentina, a group of women met in front of the embassy of that country to show solidarity. Upon arrival, two groups faced each other, separated by the police. On one side, feminist activists and sympathizers. On the other, a group made up mostly of young men, some carrying white flags with red crosses, shouting "Con mis hijos no te metas" ("Do not mess with my children"). I thought there would be more women on that side, but no. Almost all were men, young, with the faces of aged altar boys, almost devoid of pleasure, who glared at the women who cried for freedom and desire. Several had Bibles in hand. Others carried rosaries. And some of them shouted, "We are the sons of the inquisitors." They were not all who were present, but there were enough for the slogan to be heard.

López's conceptualization of life provides us with a framework that goes beyond mere survival and includes creativity and politics in the specifics of Argentinian history. However, this expanded definition of life does not take into consideration the relevance of religion, which is an important point of analysis in the Peruvian case. I think the exploration of this regional difference could allow López's analysis to be expanded. As the caboose in the recognition of women's sexual and reproductive rights, the Peruvian case (and several other cases across Latin America)—and its persistent colonial structures of power—is fertile territory on which to reflect on the strong influence of religion and the Catholic and Christian churches in the relations between body, reproduction, sexuality, and the disposition of pleasures.

Through *Not One Less*, López refers to the need to create new lineages "as a new subject, the women create their history and mother tongue—a legacy of both exploitation and disobedience" (77). Breaking that inquisitor lineage—still so loud in Peru because of its colonial legacy—should be a pivotal priority for Latin American feminisms.

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Notes

1. López, *Not One Less*, 4. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
2. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 5.

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