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Apples are to
oranges as peace is
to conflict: women
in the humanities
and (Latin American)
women's literature
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RESUMEN

PARA HACER UNA ENSALADA DE FRUTAS las manzanas y las naranjas se mezclan, aunque sean dos frutas diferentes. Y así como las manzanas y las naranjas, el conflicto y la paz son constantes elementos en la ensalada de la sociedad humana. Es imposible separarlos porque cuando nos enfrentamos a nuestros problemas para tener una existencia pacífica el conflicto surge. El conflicto aparece por la ambición del control del poder. El presente artículo presentará cuestiones actuales y relevantes a las definiciones de la identidad del “ser” de las mujeres en el campo de las humanidades en relación con la literatura escrita por autoras latinoamericanas. Mi argumento es que el conflicto y la paz son dos entidades de imposible separación. Al enfocarme en las mujeres, mostraré sus estrategias de transformación y reformatión de su “ser” en situaciones difíciles. Hay un proceso en el que ellas mismas se atribuyen el poder que sale de un medioambiente que rápidamente misoginiza a la mujer, en particular a la mujer negra en el campo de las humanidades. No obstante, estas mujeres magistralmente orquestan un cambio de “signos de poder” y “signos de respeto” por sus talentos. ¿Cómo ocurre el cambio? El cambio ocurre en la búsqueda desesperada de la paz en medios conflictivos donde los talentos se levantan y se reconocen. Irónicamente, el campo de las humanidades son cualquier cosa menos “humanista,” es decir se le ha bofetado con guante blanco por ser carente de lo “humano” en lo que implica su título “humanidad.”

Palabras Claves: poder, campo de las humanidades, mujer negra, literatura latinoamericana, latinas en los Estados Unidos.

ABSTRACT

APPLES AND ORANGES GO TO TOGETHER TO MAKE UP A FRUIT SALAD but are two different food substances. Just as apples and oranges, conflict and peace are constant elements in the societal salad of humanity. They are an impossible separation because when confronting our troubles for a peaceful existence conflict surfaces. Conflict comes about because of ambition for power and control. In this paper I will present current issues concerning definitions of identity of the self in the women in the humanities vis-a-vis in (Latin American) women’s literature. My argument is peace and conflicts are inseparable entities. By focusing on women, I will show their strategies of transformation and reshaping of

their selves in difficult situations. There is a process of self-empowerment that surges in these environments that are quick to misogynize women, in particular women of color in the humanities. Nonetheless, these women of color masterfully orchestrate a shift to “signs of power” and “signs of respect” by their talents. How does the shift occur? The shift occurs from a desperate search for peace from conflictive environments where talents use up and become known. Ironically, the humanities take its beating as being void of anything of “humanity.”

Keywords: Power, the field of humanities, women of color, Latin American literature, US Latina.

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 APPLES AND ORANGES GO TO TOGETHER TO MAKE UP a fruit salad but are two different food substances. Like apples and oranges, conflict and peace are constant elements in the societal salad of humanity. They are an inseparable elements because when confronting our troubles for a peaceful existence, conflict surfaces. Conflict comes about because of ambition of power and control. In this paper I will present current issues concerning definitions of identity of the self in the women in the humanities vis-a-vis in (Latin American) women’s literature. My argument is that peace and conflict are impossible to separate. By focusing on women, I will show their strategies of transformation and reshaping of their selves in difficult situations. There is a process of self-empowerment that surges in these environments that are quick to misogynize women, in particular women of color in the humanities. Nonetheless by their talents, these women of color masterfully orchestrate a shift to “signs of power” and “signs of respect”. How does the shift occur? The shift occurs from a desperate search for peace from conflictive environments where talents up rise and become known. Ironically, the humanities takes its beating as being void of anything of “humanity.”

First, I propose to examine the meaning of “power” through a series of three different literary theorists because conflict stems from a struggle of power. Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory* states, “power of critical discourse moves on several levels. It is the power of ‘policing language’...of policing writing itself, classifying it into ‘literary’ and ‘non-literary,’...It is the power of authority vis-à-vis other—the power relations between those who define and preserve the discourse, and those who are selectively admitted to it. It is the power...[to] those who have been judged to speak the discourse better or worse” (203).

Power for Italian theorist Umberto Eco is a web. He states that power is present in delicate motion of state and different classes and groups. This energy is a coercion to live your life or perform your job one way over another. He continues to state that power can not be destroyed because it is like a network, a web, which continuously pops-up some where else. The only way to beat power energy is to cheat it through liberating discourse, through literature.

Michel Foucault states, “ ‘what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression” (119). Therefore, power can be viewed as an energy that may be used in a positive helpful or negative harmful way. When power is used in a positive form we are using love, harmony, joy, and peace. When used in a negative manner, it is being used as fear of the other or the unknown, which may manifest itself as hate and anger. By viewing power as a positive and as a negative energy, it is understood that the physical world is a world of dichotomies and combinations of opposites, always divisible.

Power can be viewed in the literary canon. The literary canon is made up of an establishment of androcentric elitists. Their aim is to enshrine pieces of literary works that exclude some literature, as is the case of some Latin American female authors who falling to the margins. The network of the power evaluative process can be viewed in publishing establishments as well. Author Isabel Allende states, “I would have liked to have been a man because they lead much more comfortable lives...life has been made much harder for us [women]. I come from a continent where women have had to make twice the effort to obtain half the recognition in any field” (21). It is through power that the females’ art or creations are selected for admittance into the patriarchal arena of literary institutions. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, “Art is about identity,” so when women’s creations are questioned and considered as ‘unworthy’ because of prejudiced male centered standards (XXIV), their identity is being attacked and their creativity becomes political, thus considered conflictive. Virginia Woolf in “A Room of One’s Own” says that the conviction of choice of one book over another as having more value is greatly a matter of cultural ideological preferences:

This is an important book, the critic assumes, because it deals with war. This is an insignificant book because it deals with the feelings of women in a drawing-room. A scene in a battlefield is more important than a scene in a shop

- everywhere and much more subtly the difference of value persists. (77)

The question about the literary value of a book and its significance of sexual difference is its identity. If women's identity is in consistent portrayal of degradation or absent from literary works then the self of a woman is a feeling of powerlessness. Language and writing are acts of creativity, thus each creativity identifies and reaffirms the Ich, the moi, the I of the female subject. Positive affirmations empower women. That is to say, the narrative is an account interpretable in terms of the circulation of signs and sign relations which produce knowledge, new knowledge, power and power of knowledge.

The work of Latin American authors such as Laura Esquivel, Carmen Boullosa, and Marcela Serrano seems to be inextricably linked to political criticism of feminist voices of Latin America. These and other female authors have tried to generate and envision a way of transcending the patriarchal power and system of aesthetic values without denying themselves of all evaluative norms, while affirming the value of female art and cultural practice.

The Latin American canon is perceived by women authors as uniquely prohibitive and repressive because it is built upon the sexist edifice of Latin American male power. Young Latin American female authors cognizant of this truth are struggling to find a proper way to re-appropriate the myths of origin and to access the "women of history" in their unique, more egalitarian way. They accomplish this by imaginatively uplifting their Latin American historical past in a highly personal manner and by "re-reading" or "re-inscribing" themselves into the pages. In *Nosotras que nos queremos tanto*,¹ Serrano presents on page after page the existential conditions of Latin American women of all social classes. The readers enter the very personal, individual, private space of the female to the public, national space of these women characters. The entire novel is presented through the gaze of the women. By re-reading history and re-inscribing these women into the history of these pages, Serrano thrusts the reader to realization, just as the characters of the novel. Women must be powerful enough to protest, to speak their mind in order to gain their path toward liberation of male control.

Latin American female authors belittled and oppressed at home, have come eagerly to the fountain of American and European feminism: "In Latin America, no one wanted to read my novels, so I sent them by mail to Spain, and that's where they were published. As a result they were promoted and became known," asserts Allende (23). Thus, their interfacing with American and European feminist thinking, Latin American women have begun to successfully subvert the Latin American literary canon in their writing.

The Latin American female authors shift to an empowerment. Puerto Rican poet, Julia de Burgos sees the change Latin American women are capable of making:²

not I; I am life, strength, woman.

.....
I belong to no one, or to everyone, because to everyone, everyone,
I give myself in my pure feeling and my thought.

You are a housewife, resigned, submissive,
Ruled by the prejudices of men; not I;
I am a runaway Rocinante
Sniffing at horizons for the justice of God.

.....
While the multitudes race about frantically,
leaving behind ashes from the burnt-out injustices,
and while with the torch of the seven virtues
the multitudes pursue the seven sins,
against you, and against everything unjust and inhuman,
I shall go into their midst with the torch in my hand. (Anzaldúa 229-30)

Latin American writers, who like Julia de Burgos can not find normalcy in their national life in a country still enmeshed in male dominated power, tend to seek out the security of normalcy in meaningful male-female egalitarian relationships. The poetic voice has come to terms with past and present day women's situations. For this realization, she has annihilated herself, recreated a new "I," and has formed a relationship with this image of l'autre, the other. She continues to construct and affirm her self image. The poetic voice ends on a positive note, a step towards freedom and control of her own self and of Latin American women. The power of language through discourse is the shift Latin American women have sought to create peace in their being.

THE HUMANITIES

ACCORDING TO AUTHOR NGAHUIA TE AEKOTUKU, the college of humanities is an area: "concerned with human beings and human culture, or with those analytic or critical methods of inquiry derived from the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself...by language, by images, by sound by movement...and all the other ways of being...by a diversity of experience" (721). However, it is in this area of academia, I speak more in terms of the departments of languages and English, that the touch of human spirit is void of anything of "humanity." In these departments of humanities there are groups that polarize and thrive on patriarchal power, which lack the "approving mirroring self-object"³ of female support. The power that polarizes is

the negative energy of hate, anger, shame and fear that is very critical of women and in particular women of color. In this area, the negative power is sure to pop-up because there are so many definitions of what is “right” in literature and art. Literature according to Tony Morrison illuminates different claims and detoxifies consequences of globalism (717). The consequences, though, of many claims and many interpretations by critics or experts of the art or literature are:

notorious manipulations to still inquiry, incite violence, reaffirm rule. It can also be used to beat citizens into conformity by inventing a politely cruel vocabulary in which ‘different’ means unacceptable, in which ‘standards’ are invoked not to raise them with a jolt of new strength or an arc of fresh vision but to repair them, patch them with string and panic and the arrogance born of frightened, insecure power.” (Morrison 717)

Women in these situations are relegated to either play by the big boys’ rules or caste their selves to “femme fatale.” In the case of “femme fatale,” there is no-support, which leaves the female feeling in a state of helplessness and a candidate of “self-fragmentation.” This situation can be externalized either in a destructive narcissistic rage or in a mature knowledgeable rage. The female scholar needs to devise a mechanism in order to survive, as Eco’s states; she will need to cheat the existing power system set-up. The female will succeed in taking control of her life in the humanities via self-assertiveness, despite the complete absence of the self, in that phallogocentric academia society, where conditions and possibility of negative affects make accessibility to express herself freely more difficult.

The desperate search of peace from a conflictive environment beckons an up-rise on the female scholars’ talents. In academia, she will have to transform her desire from a “powerless academe” to an in “power scholar.” The female scholar will have to rid herself of that “poor me” in the phallogocentric system, in other words take on a sign of exile and immediately forge on another sign, the sign of object, the desiring object, the powerful object. How does this take place? There is no set formula; however, each woman scholar must disentangle herself, each in her own way from these damaging and unhealthy environments and re-define herself in terms of new egalitarian and equitable parameters. The antithesis of this shift to empowerment does not mean to create a simulacrum of the inculcated negative power system, rather a positive power whereby the self-changed accomplished produces a new meaning, of new knowledge, and ultimately the locus of restoration for the fragmented self or selves.

Women of color within these institutions are in a double bind and are victimized as the “other” due to ethics and politics of sexual difference. Audre Lorde in her essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House” states that the white center patriarchal power system is a tight network, those that lie outside this system tend to be women of color. The women of color are taught to ignore differences that cause separation in academia or society even though they are treated as marginal. Unfortunately for these women on the margins, they must struggle twice as hard and must learn “to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those other identified as outside the structures, in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish” (Moraga et al 99). In *This Bridge Called My Back*, the compilation of essays and poetry all echo prejudice or bias against women of color. Authors such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Norma Alarcón, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Audre Lorde and many more express the hellish existence in the professional space and in society because they are of color and are women. These two factors weigh heavily in white phallogocentric establishments; their voices and their votes are put down or they are simply invisible because of their heavy double bridge they carry around as women of color.

CONCLUSION

IN THE END, JUST AS APPLES AND ORANGES are fruits, men and women are human. We are members of one race, the human race. In regards to power there really is no way out of it; freedom from conflict or power is a fantasmagoric illusion (Aronowitz 168). Therefore, the only thing left to do is try to create an environment of positive power because positive power is creative, peaceful, accepting and joyful of the other. The question is not for women to create a simulacrum of male power, it is for all to re-evaluate the male-centered system and encourage critics to reflect on the power of discourse. All is made and changed through the incarnation of the written word. Before coming to an end, I want to mention and acknowledge at least en passant, there have been some Latin American male authors who have helped some Latin American women authors, but these Latin American male authors and their help has been scarce. The size and purpose of this paper has allowed me only to reflect on the on-going issues that affect all women in today’s world.

NOTES

- 1 Serrano deconstructs the original bolero by The Panchos, “Nosotros que nos queremos tanto,” to create her title. In her title she inscribes center stage the female figure. In addition, Serrano’s title is loaded with a strong political message against Pinochet’s government. In the novel the female figures participate as military figures in opposition to the government.
- 2 Burgos’s poem was translated to English by William M Davis. See *Making Face, Making Soul...* by GLORIA ANZALDÚA, 1990, p. 227-230.
- 3 Jacques Lacan’s term. The recognition of the “I” connected to the subject. It is a process of cognition thinking, Cartesian thought. See *Écrits* by JACQUES LACAN, trans. Alan Sheridan 1977.

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