

## Introduction

# Like an Earthquake to the Soul: Experiencing the Visionary Philosophy of María Lugones

Pedro J. DiPietro, Jennifer McWeeny, and Shireen Roshanravan

*I inherit a legacy of colonial mimicry as a South Asian American of Parsi descent. To assimilate the ways of those in power was a key survival mechanism that my family and larger community instilled in me. I came to María and her work through a desire to identify politically as a Woman of Color and found in her the kind of faithful witness who would call me to transform against my disposition to assimilate to power. The call, heard in her writing and in my work with her, was always demanding but unquestioningly loving in its commitment to accompany me in my desire to remake myself against the grain of oppressive familial tradition and communal expectations.*

*I was in my first semester of graduate school when I first read María's work, and I was immediately taken in by its intricacy, depth, and complexity at the precipice of feminist-antiracist social change. I knew it in my body, but not in my language at the time, that María was giving me a way to articulate a past and a colonial inheritance, a longing and a hurt, that I never thought could be expressed. For me, María's praxis was an opening and an invitation to travel deeper into myself by undertaking the fraught but necessary work of coalition across difference, of finding myself and my fears and desires by listening to others on their terms, by traveling to their comportments and worlds. Here I found something that I had rarely encountered before: an encouragement to go forward in connecting with others.*

*When I first met María my heart would swell and felt larger, my body felt recognized, and my spirit connected to hers. Her style of moving intentions across sometimes unfriendly terrains made me aware of her determination to ignite insurgent desires. We were both born in Argentina and learned from our families how to negotiate the ties to the country's underside, outsiders, and detractors. Our encounter pushed me to see the world with blurring eyes, revealing porous realities of uncertain and yet thickly resistant meanings. Witnessing her maneuvering of the legacies of colonization across*

*multiple sites of struggle and identification moved me to embrace my resistant positionality as a transnational, Latinx, and feminist practitioner. If the education I received had led me to mistrust my flesh, its aberrant passions and needs, María read me thriving in them. In learning with and from her, I have come to inhabit the illicit dwellings of my soul, heart, and spirit.*

Through our different journeys of engaging María Lugones and her commitment to radical political and intellectual formations, the three of us came together to realize a book that entices others to encounter her thinking, enter into it, and be touched by it. The urgency of our desire to share the possibilities of transformation that we each individually found in Lugones's writing both motivated and sustained our collaboration on this collection. Lugones's coalitional approach to praxis, rooted in Women of Color feminist politics, taught us not to take our collaboration as co-editors for granted. Rather, we emphasize the *pull* we feel to Lugones's work that compelled us to generate this collection and to do so with an intimacy that is risky—risky because Lugones's work delivers the possibilities of the self in a way that makes the appeal of individualism too strenuous to the soul. For each of us, engagement with her work has felt like an earthquake to the soul, igniting deep longings for ever-expanding circles of resistant company that require contesting familiar, safe, common-sense boundaries of kin, community, and identity. We offer *Speaking Face to Face* as an invitation to experience Lugones's visionary philosophy, to shift your ground of collective possibility, and to ignite your resistant imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Earthquakes are born of tension points that, when released, shift the ground beneath us. The eruption sets one in motion, fleeing potential death, looking for new footing to build one's self, one's life, one's community anew. Such are the conditions under which Lugones left Argentina in the 1960s and arrived in the United States in the midst of the Civil Rights and Third World Liberation movements. In her words: "My location is that of someone who relocated away from battering, systematic rape, extreme psychological and physical torture, by those closest to me. I relocated in the sense of going for a new geographical place, a new identity, a new set of relations" (IP 19). The pain of enduring violence inflicted by those closest to her, and then entering a new terrain of struggle as a "nondiasporic Latina,"<sup>2</sup> shapes the ground of her insurgent feminist theorizing.<sup>3</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Lugones's work never takes for granted that community, coalition, or solidarity is something given, presumed by blood, law, or even shared interests and identity. Concrete experiences of oppressing / being oppressed ↔ resisting punctuate Lugones's writings, allowing the reader to sense the connection between her negotiations with institutional and interpersonal violence and her

practical theorizing of the obstacles and pathways toward forging company in the face of isolating despair.<sup>4</sup> In her work as feminist philosopher, professor, popular educator, community organizer, and *compañera*, as with the chapters in this book, you come face to face with questions such as: Who do you come to understand as your own people? What constitutes the ground of this claim? Is it solid? Or can you feel it tremble with histories of harm yet to be confronted or repaired? What are the central points of tension in your communal groundings that are on the verge of release?

The notion that one does not find one's own people but rather forges them in a constant process of building deep coalitions of understanding permeates Lugones's body of work, from her doctoral dissertation on the radical potential of friendship, *Morality and Personal Relations*, completed in 1978 at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, to her contemporary elaboration of a decolonial feminism to her grassroots community organizing and popular education work with Chicanas/os, Mexicanas/os, and Hispanas/os in Northern New Mexico, in Pilsen and La Villita in Chicago, and in East Los Angeles, as well as with Indigenous movements in Bolivia and with those working in antiviolence movements and Women of Color organizing across the United States. Guided by the maxim "I won't think what I won't practice," Lugones calls on us to invest in perceptions of ourselves as accomplices in struggles to end violence in all its forms. Important to her development of this maxim is her involvement in the Escuela Popular Norteña, the popular education collective that she cofounded, and other national organizations in antiviolence movements such as Critical Resistance and Incite! Women, Gender NonConforming, and Trans People of Color Against Violence.

Throughout her oeuvre, Lugones reimagines in concrete and practical steps, tactics, and strategies, the untapped and hidden possibilities of subject formation. From within a politics focused on magnifying the everyday, or what happens at the corner, at home, and on the street, and from within what she calls "body-to-body engagement," or the places of intimacy so readily denied insurgent potential, her theorizing begins with the reconstitution of the subject and uncharted ways of interpreting praxis (TSC 207). This book is thus motivated by Lugones's spirit of *playfully* exploring pain and pleasure, suffering and resistance, oppression and liberation, always with an eye to forging expansive coalitions of understanding.<sup>5</sup>

The work of U.S. and Third World Women of Color feminists M. Jacqui Alexander, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Cherrie Moraga, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Chela Sandoval, and Barbara Smith has been important political and intellectual company for Lugones. In *Pilgrimages/*

Peregrinajes: *Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, she describes Women of Color coalition as a “formation against significant and complex odds” that depends on an “epistemological shift to non-dominant differences” (WT 84; see also Lorde 1984, 111). From her early examination of how people of color utilize the dominant logic of “the real and the fake” to police the boundaries of their homegrown resistant seeing-circles (BP) to her rejection of homophobic injunctions within nationalist affirmations of Latina/o community (ED), Lugones elaborates cognitive shifts that expose our complicity with the many faces of domination.

Lugones’s analysis of these shifts translates shared feminist yearnings for solidarity into opportunities to trouble the notion of ally-ship at the different sites of contemporary struggles for justice, such as the movement to end sexual violence against women of color or the Black Lives Matter Movement. The National Women’s Studies Association conference in 2017 invited scholars, activists, and artists to reflect on the forty-year legacy of the Combahee River Collective (CRC) and its 1977 Black feminist manifesto. The conference discussed the very concerns that Black women writers/activists gathered in the manifesto with regard to multiracial, multigender, and anticapitalist struggles. A year earlier, 2016 marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of the publication of *This Bridge Called My Back*, a foundational anthology of Women of Color writers that weaves their voices and experiences into teachings about the coalitional possibilities of antiracist feminisms. *Speaking Face to Face* offers timely and enriching contributions to the examination of Lugones’s body of work within the broader constellation of Women of Color thought that CRC and *This Bridge* embody. This work is important, unprecedented, and crucial in the genealogy of Women of Color feminisms.<sup>6</sup>

Whether this is your first time encountering Lugones’s thinking or you are a seasoned reader of her essays, whether you have worked in the kinds of activist circles that Lugones has moved through or you are new to Women of Color political praxis, we offer this book to you as a nexus of multiple points of entry into her work. As co-editors, we foresee readers in classrooms, activist circles, and popular education workshops learning more about Lugones and giving uptake to the originality of her philosophy by exploring, in close company with others, how to interpret the questions she inspires about coalitional praxis: What are the practical and theoretical meanings of joint and bridged struggles and collaborations? What are the body-to-body, coalitional possibilities of practicing solidarity across multiple borders and boundaries?

## SPEAKING FACE TO FACE

Speaking face to face, a practice described in Lugones's early essay that bears that title (HCS), calls members of feminist circles to examine our motivations concerning empathy and sympathy toward each other. Primarily, it provides a method for both interpreting and dislodging ethnocentric racism and its shaping of our capacity for communication and interdependence (HCS 43). It makes us confront the ways that colonial legacies inform political friendships. What would happen to one's senses of integrity, of accountability, of being committed to fighting against all forms of injustice if one had the privilege of hearing only one's own voice, or of choosing to silence everyone else's? What would happen if that sense of one's commitment to social justice entailed distortion and appropriation of the lives, thoughts, and dreams belonging to those one deems the closest to one's position and history?

Lugones's questions about distortion, disengagement, and silencing apply, more broadly, to those contexts where any two people come together with the intention of making our world a better place. Gloria Anzaldúa concurs with Lugones's analysis of how racism bears on such collaborations when she states that there is not enough honest talk about racism and that we neglect to acknowledge how much it permeates all aspects of life (1990, xix). More recent scholarship demonstrates that much has yet to be discussed about racism within ethnic, feminist, and women's studies classrooms and movements (Chang 2007; Cruz 2013; Falcón 2015; Hernandez and Rehman 2002; Pough 2007).

Together with an account of the barriers that racism brings to feminist collaborations, Lugones offers creative suggestions about the practice of speaking face to face. Rather than focusing on feminists of color directing all their efforts to changing how they are heard, distorted, or silenced, she invites them instead to devote equal energy to affirming their realities even at the risk of making no sense to the members of a dominant culture (HCS). This is significant when we think about our classrooms, where the tensions among geopolitical, economic, and sociocultural differences are ever starker today. It has been our experience that modeling feminist classrooms centered on women of color thinkers incites feelings of confusion, disorientation, guilt, and anger. In what ways, inside and outside the classroom, can we foster a critical competence that moves us forward, beyond but not necessarily avoiding the political and epistemic value of anger and resentment, beyond the consequences of ignorance and self-delusion or the frustration associated with wanting to do right and being ill-equipped to learn how? In what ways do women of color

communicate to each other and with each other by anchoring their sense of who they are in opposition to available languages, histories, and knowledges?

Becoming fluent in speaking face to face entails a willingness to know oneself in unfamiliar ways that may take us to expand our sense of who we are in relations of solidarity. In feminist struggles, speaking face to face animates alternative realities, providing a faithful mirror to those seeking self-affirmation outside dominant culture. The readers of this text may recognize such moments in their own learning environments but also throughout the chapters in this book since they refuse to settle or downplay the tensions that ensue when centering Women of Color epistemologies. As co-editors of this book, we looked to the practice of speaking face to face, of fostering solidarity across differences and divides, as a model for interrogating our own process of becoming feminist collaborators. The three of us have learned to listen to each other “without presupposing unity of expression or experience” (TY 573). Recognizing the difficulty of saying “we” without erasing the multiplicity and tension this “we” holds, we have worked to develop the capacity of “faithfully witnessing” the generative dimension of our differences (IP 7). This faithful hearing does not resolve disagreements as much as mine them for what they reveal about our unexamined assumptions. In what follows, we offer moments where we had to confront selves complicit with domination that we did not realize we animated until we encountered communicative impasses in our collaboration.

Not only do the three of us have dissimilar journeys into the coalitional politics of Women of Color praxis but also diverging connections to activism, academic appointments, philosophical training, and Lugones’s work. We inhabit different social locations: a queer South Asian American-becoming-Woman of Color from Texas; a white, Boston-born, American-Irish woman who carries immigrant and working-class legacies; and a nonbinary transfeminine Latinx originally from the Andes. We each find Lugones’s praxical thinking affirming to us in our complexity and ambiguities, and in our shared interest in getting people together beyond our own scope, even though we come to her work differently. And yet, the “physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings” place us on historical ground already ridden with deep fissures (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 23). They erupted in our co-editing process, leading to moments of communicative impasse.

One significant tension emerged with respect to how we each are situated within coalition building and Women of Color politics. Although Lugones is

trained and known as a philosopher, Shireen never engaged Lugones's work in terms of her being a philosopher, but rather in terms of her commitment to advance a coalitional politics of Women of Color. Terms like *ontological* and *phenomenological* blocked her engagement in conversations that, to her, seemed to be *about* Lugones's philosophical import and not *from within* the practice of coalitional politics. While the three of us recognize that feelings of incompetence in relation to disciplinary language are both raced and gendered, we didn't always succeed in shifting our collective engagement with Lugones.

What gets to be read as fluency in a specialized field, such as women's studies or feminist philosophy, also speaks to broader dynamics within contemporary feminist collaborations, many seeking to close the gap between rural and urban, periphery and center, local and global, and activism and academia. Lugones instead intervenes in the theory/practice divide by praxisically placing feminist theorizing "in the midst of people mindful to the tensions, desires, closures, cracks, and openings that make up the social" (IP 5). How then were we supposed to take each other on while being mindful of our tensions in the face of writing and press deadlines? How were we to faithfully take each other on without breaking our spirits?

At times, in our co-writing process, Pedro found that we were missing openness toward each other in the form of disengagement. Speaking face to face also made Pedro confront the image that they may have of themselves as moral or good people. In cases when Pedro disagreed with both Jen and Shireen about an editorial choice, Pedro would painfully read their agreement as a matter of cisgender feminist affinity. Questions of authority and knowledge arose, and Pedro shied away from asking point blank whether Jen and Shireen would have had equally critical views had the contributions at hand been written by a cisgender man of color submitting feminist scholarship for this book. Many readers, as well as students in a women's and gender studies classroom, are likely familiar with the type of discomfort that Pedro experienced—that is, with not asking what everybody else in the room may be thinking. Take, for instance, the situation where a straight-identified cisman of color gets a pass from their women of color classmates on pressing questions about crossgender solidarity just because the cisman was down enough to enroll in a women's studies class. Pedro has seen racially privileged women who, within similar dynamics, asked women of color to explain the reasons behind their choosing to give cismen of color a pass when it comes to sexism. Asking satisfies the need of racially privileged women to be taught and to learn. Their decision places the burden of dispelling their ignorance on those who may intend to remain unintelligible.

In some interactions with Jen and Shireen, Pedro came to pause the impulse to ask, dwelling instead in the possibilities of not knowing.

Some of the most difficult times of the collaborative process for Jen involved receiving the politics of disengagement. She experienced these relational moments as thick and dense in their concreteness, attention-pulling and anxiety-producing insofar as she wished for connection and resolution. At certain points, she found these modes of communicating and her responsive impulses suffocating; it is harrowing to feel missed in who you understand yourself to be at the same time that you long for intellectual and political intimacy. Jen also felt deep confusion both because of her relative lack of practical experience with many of the communicative and political methodologies that we were employing and because even her resistant selves that she had cultivated over a lifetime of feminist and antiracist practice were reflected in unfamiliar, destabilizing ways. We understand that given the systemic nature of multiple oppressions or “the coloniality of gender” (HGS, CG, TDF, DF), the liberatory frames that have been embraced by those who benefit from dominant constructions of reality can often signal complicity with the violent reduction of women of color. Within our collective, Jen sensed the multiple meanings when she thought of the possibility of her expressing vantage points that see from a lower economic class; this way of interacting could be a defense against hearing viewpoints that revealed her racial or gender privilege. Speaking face to face does not always entail looking at each other head-on, being in proximity to one another, verbalizing methods and designs step by step, or knowing what comes next; it also involves sideways glances, turning one’s attention elsewhere, learning and listening in the silences, walking away and then returning differently.

Several of the chapters that this book brings together also reflect on some of the tensions we’ve encountered when speaking face to face. They underscore that doing feminist community is not without painful lessons, most of which are attached to the possibility of fostering interdependence. In our own journey, we have graciously learned to end conversations on disagreement, not so much as a result of relativism but rather as a way of stopping the defense of one’s ground of meaning. As co-editors, we have come to realize this book after roughly six years, and we are aware that we still long for a more satisfying kind of conviviality and intimacy. Each chapter in *Speaking Face to Face* offers expressions that are at once personal and outward-moving. In this sense, they are loving gestures of *facing* other people. Resonating with Lugones’s determination to think beyond the confines of social fragmentation, ours is a practice of situated writing that asks, “*En qué voz*, with which voice, *anclada en qué*

*lugar*, anchored in which place, *para qué y porqué*, why and to what purpose, do I trust myself to you . . . ?” (HCS 45). In what follows, we detail the key concepts and themes introduced in each of the book’s sections and describe the ways the chapters extend and apply Lugones’s ideas.

### COALITIONAL SELVES, MULTIPLE REALITIES

Our collaboration was set in motion through multiple coalitional spaces inspired by Lugones’s work in and beyond the classroom. At Binghamton University, Lugones was central for over two decades in the growth of the Philosophy, Interpretation, and Culture Program (PIC), unique for its interdisciplinary approach to philosophy and its emphasis on examining the relation between knowledge and action, aesthetic and political motivation, and culture and ethical practice. Shireen and Pedro met as PIC graduate students in 2003 and became part of a wider community that, inspired by Lugones, engaged in radical and critical theorizing. The Latina Feminism Roundtable organized by Mariana Ortega at John Carroll University was an important node in this community, where Jen and Pedro first met in 2006. One year later, the three of us found ourselves together for the first time as participants in a three-day Politics of Women of Color seminar hosted by the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Philosophy, Interpretation and Culture, where Lugones served as director for more than ten years.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned in the previous section, our collaboration has been a journey of learning to recognize and affirm the multiplicity, complexity, and impurity within and between each of us. One of her earliest articulations of multiplicity and coalition can be found in Lugones’s most famous article, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception.” To world-travel is to learn to see yourself and others through the eyes of those who inhabit the different landscapes you (in)voluntarily traverse.<sup>8</sup> World-traveling is one of many methodologies that helps build *deep coalition*, which entails coalitions of understanding that endure beyond short-term, issue-based, collaborations (IP 30). Unity is never the goal of deep coalition insofar as unity relies on the erasure of multiple ways of knowing, being, and desiring. Rather, the goal is to foster skills to navigate the ugliness and discomfort of political collaborations when they are not built to align with one’s sense of being at home, or in one’s own “barred room” in the world (Johnson Reagon 1983, 359). Deep coalitions reveal the amount of support one needs to cross cultures without killing oneself, to confront the simultaneity of each other’s complicities and resistances to multiple oppressions (363–64).

Building deep coalition requires hard work, challenging the fiction of an individualist self and its erasure of the resistant subjectivity of those targeted for exploitation, genocide, enslavement, and other logics of systemic oppression operative in neoliberal capitalist and white supremacist realities. To understand the cultural power of the individualist self, one need only reflect on Western culture's ableist celebration of the "self-made man" whose legibility is dependent on the racist construction of the Black "welfare queen" (Cohen 1997; Clare 1999). Lugones shatters the individualist fiction of the "self-made man" who deserves what he gets and gets what he deserves by putting pressure on the concept of agency it hails. Because notions of agency are inextricably tied to notions of the individualist unified subject, the concept erases the many collectivities and institutionalized circuits of exploitation that enable the fiction of the individualist agentic self. Many of our students come to college with meritocracy ingrained in their value system, particularly if they belong to racially privileged groups, taking for granted that as long as they work hard they will get where they are going with no debts to anyone, either for their failures or successes. In dispelling this myth, Lugones crafts the notion of an "active subject" to illuminate our ability to form intentions against the grain of the hegemonic system that subjects us, and to emphasize how this ability is dependent on socialities that can sustain and intensify resistance (TSC 211; WGS). Using the term *active subjectivity* rather than *agency*, Lugones offers language for marking the collective backup upon which all subjects depend to move their intentions into action and, thus, names the potential of the resistant-oppressed to enact sustained political transformations.

If coalition becomes the possibility for active subjectivity, then our interdependence on each other becomes a source of empowerment rather than the mark of weakness or paralysis. Lugones's account of selves and realities as multiple, without an underlying unity, makes a complicated ontological claim (WT 89; Moya 2006). Following several theorists of oppression, we call this "ontological pluralism" (SAS 55–56). It arises out of this empowering sense of liberatory interdependence that motivates coalition building across "worlds of sense," a concept Lugones introduces to reference the different social landscapes we inhabit throughout our lives. These worlds of sense anchor a unique system of meanings, sensibilities, intentions, and directions. For example, the way a queer Latinx dresses and speaks, their bodily comportment, and their sense of being at ease or on guard, will change as they move from their job at a predominantly white heterosexual male law firm to the queer dance club in the predominantly Latinx neighborhood they go to with their friends every Friday

night. This person is both the self animated in the office of the law firm and the self animated at the queer Latinx dance club; neither self, Lugones explains, is the *real* self. In her words, “one inhabits the realities as spatially, historically, and thus materially different: different in possibilities, in the connections among people, and in the relation to power” (IP 17). The multiplicity and heterogeneity present in the experiences of the queer Latinx at the law firm and the dance club is not merely a matter of one’s imagination, psychology, perspective, or interpretation. The queer Latinx dance club is a world of sense where the queer Latinx subject may inhabit their queer and Latinx identities playfully, as creative sites of resistance against their stereotypical negative meanings institutionalized by the interlocking of white supremacy, homophobia, sexism, and classism. For Lugones, it is imperative that we travel “playfully,” or without a sense of self-importance, to “worlds of sense” where we generate and affirm the resistant meanings of our nondominant differences because it is in seeing each other as resistant that we are motivated to identify with each other without requiring that we become like one another (LPF).

Central to world-traveling is a methodology of sensing oppression and resistance as never existing alone, but instead always emerging in a tense relation: oppressing ↔ resisting. In chapter 1, “Trash Talks Back,” Elizabeth V. Spelman analyzes how themes of “trash” illuminate Lugones’s challenge to the unidirectional concept of “the oppressed” as only marking victimization because, as Spelman argues, trash talks back in spite of its construction as waste, as inessential, and unproductive. Both Kelli Zaytoun and (Brena) Yu-Chen Tai consider the liberatory potentials of the *plurality of selves* that unfolds from the oppressing ↔ resisting relation. In chapter 2, “A Focus on the ‘I’ in the ‘I → We’: Self-in-Coalition and Active Subjectivity,” Zaytoun extends Lugones’s ontological vision by detailing the mutually constitutive relationships among active subjectivity, complex communication, and deep coalition in her thinking. While Zaytoun emphasizes the social and unifying aspects of this self as it seeks communication and coalition, Tai takes a different route in chapter 3, “The Ripple Imagery as a Decolonial Self.” With a close reading of *Dictée*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s experimental autobiography, which includes stories about the Japanese colonization of Korea, she expands Lugones’s theories of multiplicity and coloniality by showing how the plurality of coalitional selfhood materializes across different bodies, separated by culture and time. Taken together, the chapters in part I provide a unique viewpoint on the various pilgrimages that active subjects undertake and through which they leave no oppressions fully functional. Whereas Lugones’s concepts of selfhood and

multiplicity anchor the chapters in this section, part II continues to unearth resistant socialities with reference to her key interventions in theorizing intersectional, interlocking, and intermeshed oppressions and identities.

### MOVING WITH AND BEYOND INTERSECTIONALITY

When Lugones states that her latest work on the coloniality of gender complicates the understanding of racialized gender and goes “beyond intersectionality,” we interpret her claim as an invitation for antiracist feminisms to move with intersectionality to the edge of its contradictions (DF 72). Lugones’s focus lies with resistant, decolonizing, active subjectivity at the point of the expansion of oneself, of the search for another with whom to grow competent in each other’s struggles. Her project is then about the co-constitution of subjects, from within what lies between them in the myriad incarnations of coalitional politics.

Much in the vein of the Women of Color writers anthologized in *This Bridge* and of the members of the Combahee River Collective, Lugones seeks an analysis that makes sense of both the mechanisms of marginalization that tie together gender, race, and class, and the ways of thinking, learning, and listening of people who do theory in the flesh. She opens one’s attention to what people experience, how they experience it, how they resist and think, and how they theorize. Long before there was a field of intersectional studies or the term *intersectionality* was coined, U.S. Third World women created a new politics of solidarity. In doing so, they charted a “differential mode of consciousness” (Sandoval 2000, 54; see also Pérez 2010) and criticized available models for the interpretation of power and how it moves across one’s body, life, and identity (Davis 1981; Gunn Allen 1981; hooks 1981; Jayawardena 1986; Joseph and Lewis 1981; Lorde 1980, 1982). With her theories of ontological pluralism and active subjectivity, Lugones has taught us to move with and beyond intersectionality. She helps us understand that women of color engaging in coalition building have kindred and yet different histories in their thinking and learning, that their models for explaining the simultaneity of oppressions are situated, and that they don’t share a unified account of the invisibility imposed upon women of color, their experience, knowledge, and methods of resistance.<sup>9</sup>

Lugones’s attention to the co-constitution of subjects takes her to the examination of deep friendships, conviviality, and complex dialogue, such as those in women’s collective art-working and story-telling (Barkley Brown 1989) and those others where intimacy is earned through the thickness of everyday life (WT, SF, DC, MC, TY). She arrives at an interactive understanding of difference among women, refusing to lump women of color under the umbrella

women. Most important, her theorizing signals that some women have the lives they do because they are oppressing other women, that white middle-class women holding on to their privileges, or ignoring them, implicates both the subordination of nonwhite women and their invisibility. At a time when critiques of humanism are being co-opted by a trend to move past race and gender (Holland 2012), Lugones's decolonial feminism stands out in light of its opposition to an evacuation of the category woman of color, and in light of how this opposition bears on contemporary deployments of intersectional studies and derivative notions of intersectional identities.<sup>10</sup>

By engaging Lugones's theorizing of multiple oppressions, we invite readers to recognize her visionary journey into the work of feminists of color from the early to mid-1980s. To do so would allow those reading this book to interrogate intersectionality as a nodal point where women of color, co-constituted by multiple oppressions, unveil intertwined logics of marginalization and discrimination. It would also be significant to consider how, in turn, the politics of race and gender shape the production of knowledge about intersectionality and its circulation. What assumptions are we asked to make about the reach of intersectionality and whose voices are authorized to speak on its scope and applicability (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 791)?<sup>11</sup> Do contemporary feminist receptions usually lead us to read certain groups of women of color as the presumed subject position of intersectionality? Do they equally place *intersectionality* within a genealogy that tends to obliterate its roots prior to the term being coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989? Does Lugones's lack of a diasporic Latina/o community prevent the field from fully recognizing her insightful way of moving with and going beyond intersectionality?

There are shared features between Lugones's account of the co-constitution of subjects and other models of the simultaneity of oppressions that we find among women of color writers: all forms of what she calls "oppressing" reduce a person touched by and coupled with other oppressings (TSC 223); this process of reduction and encasing originates in hierarchical and systemic social structures (SAS 60; WT 84; TSC 231); and the person facing this encasing anticipates their own active response to being oppressed (TSC 223). What usually gets overshadowed by typical interpretations of intersectionality are the following of Lugones's contributions: (a) her theorizing offers a critique of seeing oppressions as disconnected and divisible, which she describes as the "interlocking of oppressions" or a form of domination that operates at the level of cognition; (b) she provides an alternative to the interlocking of oppressions with the notion of "intermeshing of oppressions," of multiple and mutually implicated power lines that give rise to a coalescence, or as distinct and yet

not quite divisible substances that can fully dissolve into each other; and (c) she demonstrates, in her formulation of the coloniality of gender, that seeing gender, race, class, and sexuality as interlocked underwrites widespread applications of intersectionality.

Ultimately, at stake in Lugones's proposal is a fierce critique of the notion of the modern individual, or agent, and its iteration in key theories of subjectivity within women of color thinking. One such case is the use of Crenshaw's theory to derive intersectional identities (i.e., Black women) since this use fails to account for the limitations of a method aimed at mapping legal subjectivities. Primarily, Crenshaw examines the violence perpetrated against Black women, the marginalizations, disempowerments, and vulnerabilities that cannot find any relief or uptake precisely because the law does not recognize Black women except as additions of identity categories that do not fit their experiences to begin with (1989).<sup>12</sup> Based on the model of a unitary, stable, and closed individual who is self-determining, the law constructs its subject by marginalizing certain actors or claims whose histories and identities the legal system can't contain (Lacey 1998, 144). In exposing what makes Black women invisible under the law, Crenshaw also observes that they occupy "a location that resists telling" (1991, 1242). When she describes Black women as the collision point, the intersection, where cars driving down separate streets (discriminations) meet (1989, 139), she is mapping such a location in its telling of legal subjectivities. Lugones's intervention in this debate leads us to reflect on whether the demarginalization of Black women on the map of the law prevents us from conflating legal and nonlegal subjectivities, from presuming that a legal subject equally maps what she theorizes as the co-constitution of social subjects.

In chapter 4, "Beyond the 'Logic of Purity': Post-Post-Intersectional Glimpses in Decolonial Feminism," Anna Carastathis argues precisely that categorial thinking—seeing oppressions as interlocked—is one with the logic of the legal, homogeneous subject. Therefore, what many within feminist scholarship and activism call intersectional identities are logically impossible within the law but also, as Lugones and Carastathis contend, within feminist theorizing whenever it leaves the interlocking of oppressions untouched.<sup>13</sup> Together, Carastathis's critique of a post-intersectional paradigm and the remaining chapter in part II, weave praxical dialogues about the psychosocial experience of oppressing ↔ resisting relations in which selves become both multiple and impure, and where they explore ways of witnessing resistance to colonial histories with and beyond intersectionality. In chapter 5, "Witnessing Faithfully and the Intimate Politics of Queer South Asian Praxis," Shireen Roshanravan turns to love as a transformational praxis, as a way of attending

to the communicative barriers and fragmenting logics blocking deep coalition. She shows that the practice of “witnessing faithfully” may operate as a commitment to affirm another’s multiplicity through intergenerational, community-defined well-being. Teasing out the nuances of Lugones’s contribution within intersectional studies and its application to critical analysis of racialized gender, part II sets the stage to engage the paradigmatic shift that she calls the “coloniality of gender.”

### GENDER, COLONIALITY, AND DECOLONIAL EMBODIMENTS

Lugones published one of her most impactful articles, “Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System,” in *Hypatia* in 2007. Here she articulates a new theory of gender that takes seriously the notion’s “deep imbrication” with race and coloniality (HGS 187). She argues that the concept of gender emerged in tandem with the expansion of colonialism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the consequent advent of the modern concept of race as a means of classifying people, labor pools, subjectivities, and knowledges. For Lugones, gender does not signify the binary categories of either male or female, or even a spectrum of genders between these poles, but a system of relations with light and dark sides. The light side of the colonial/modern gender system is the one most often referred to in mainstream feminist theorizing and activism: it is based on the ideas of biological dimorphism and heterosexuality between men and women, opposing an ideal of the weak, passive, domestically bound, and sexually pure woman to that of a strong, active, self-governing, and sexually aggressive man. The light side is hegemonic in that it establishes the modern meanings of “woman” and “man,” and thus of “human”—those who are civilized and evolved enough to warrant the labels “woman” and “man.” By contrast, the dark side of the colonial/modern gender system does not organize gender in these terms; colonized/nonwhite females were “understood as animals in the deep sense of ‘without gender,’ sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity” (HGS 202–3). This construal of colonized and nonwhite peoples is “thoroughly violent” (206) as it works to justify the hierarchies constitutive of Eurocentered capitalism—the labor exploitation, sexual exploitation, abuse, reduction to animality, and denigration of cosmologies and knowledges of those on the dark side.

Most important, the light side of the colonial/modern gender system is maintained by perpetuating the dark side: the more people of color are dehumanized, the more womanly and manly white bourgeois people become. In this way, the priority given to heterosexuality in the colonial/modern gender

system has simultaneously turned “people into animals and [...] white women into reproducers of ‘the (white) race’ and ‘the (middle or upper) class’” (HGS 201). Lugones refers to this reduction of people that “fits them for classification” as *coloniality* (TDF 745). The hallmarks of Lugones’s theory of gender are, first, that it recognizes the differential ways that gender is constructed in relation to Europeans/whites and colonized/nonwhite peoples, and, second, that it sees the concept of gender as a colonial/modern imposition developed in the service of consolidating and facilitating the global exercise of power in Eurocentered capitalism.<sup>14</sup>

Lugones’s description of the colonial/modern gender system is born out of her struggle with questions that arise in the context of political organizing: Why do men of color often assume a posture of indifference toward “the systematic violences inflicted upon women of color” (HGS 188)? Why do white bourgeois women fail to take the coloniality of power seriously, fail to recognize the constitutive relations between gender, race, class, and colonization in their politics (187)? Lugones observes how these patterns of indifference that inhabit political practice are respectively reflected in the ways that men of color make sense of coloniality and decolonization, on the one hand, and white women make sense of gender, on the other. For example, although Lugones’s view builds on Aníbal Quijano’s notion of the “coloniality of power,” she sees his account as too narrow because it naturalizes gender by conceiving of it as a heterosexual dispute over sexual access and reproduction (HGS 189–90). The heteropatriarchal gender binary of “man/woman” in this framework becomes white supremacist criteria for colonizing definitions of who counts as “human,” but also of who counts as the subject of feminist struggles. U.S. Third World liberation, anticolonial, and mainstream feminist movements that employ gender and heteropatriarchal rhetoric in their struggles to be recognized as “human” reinforce the very logics of coloniality justifying violence against them.

The coloniality of gender paradigm positions Lugones’s thinking differently than before in relation to feminist theory since it views the concept of gender as violent, a colonial/modern invention that facilitates the racialization and dehumanization of those under colonial rule and its aftermath. Whereas her earliest work, such as “Have We Got a Theory for You!,” problematizes any feminism that would take the group “women” as its universal subject, this new phase in Lugones’s thinking turns from criticizing this central category of feminism to changing the very terms of the discussion through an original analysis of gender (HGS 188). Moreover, white feminists and lesbian activists who align themselves with Lugones’s earlier feminist work, especially in its engaging certain forms of separatism as politically useful, may have difficulty

recognizing their embrace of womanhood as a feature of the light side of the gender system and its complicity with coloniality and the dehumanization of people of color.<sup>15</sup>

The colonial/modern gender system not only offers a new way of thinking about gender, it also calls for a corollary form of political praxis—one where the critique of coloniality is enacted in everyday, intersubjective relations (TDF 746–47). Lugones names this praxis “decolonial feminism,” which she describes as “the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender” (TDF 747). As a practice passed on across generations, the decolonial marks the coexistence of mechanisms of dehumanization over colonized and localized resistances—that is, resistant ways of claiming resources, beliefs, languages, knowledges, and passions. The decolonial, at its most suggestive, delivers a wealth of social arrangements, embodied in ways of speaking, gesturing, praying, cooking, working, being carnally intimate, and so many others. In the unearthing of this wealth, numerous questions about colonizing mechanisms and decolonial possibilities guide our path: What forms of labor, such as indentured servitude, are integral to the subordination of Native and indigenous economies, spiritualities, kinship, and authority? What type of economies, such as sustainable farming, carry with them subaltern legacies in opposition to the colonization of non-Western forms of kinship? What type of spiritual systems, cosmologies, and ways of understanding the nonworldly provide principles of relationality antithetical to sexual dimorphism and its anchoring of the coloniality of gender? Which approaches to sexual violence center women of color and their history of dehumanization vis-à-vis the state’s protection of white middle-class femininity? By wakening us to the memories that these questions seek, decolonial feminism instills an anticapitalist sentiment in our fashioning of differences, resistances, and coalitions (TDF 754).

Lugones’s theory of the colonial/modern gender system has been employed to illuminate a variety of resistant experiences and colonial positions, from those discussed in Donato Ndongo’s novel *Shadows of Your Black Memory* (Figuerola 2015) to those that shape marriage practices in Khumasi, Ghana (Nave 2017). Each of the chapters in part III of this book continues these extensions of Lugones’s concept by respectively providing a contextualized point of entry into this new paradigm, while also taking up the call to reflect on complicated moments of complicity with the coloniality of gender. In chapter 6, “Border Thinking/Being/Perception,” Madina Tlostanova exposes an understanding of colonial oppression that merges Lugones’s light and dark sides of the colonial/modern gender system. In her view, Caucasus and Central Asian peoples suffer systemic violence at the same time as they are illegible as

colonized peoples—particularly when they are compared to Amerindians and enslaved Africans and their descendants who are readily seen as colonized. In chapter 7, “Motion Sickness and the Slipperiness of Irish Racialization,” Jennifer McWeeny describes the phenomenon of “ontological slipperiness,” an experience and a disorder that involves moving between at least two distinct or “partitioned” racialized positions in the coloniality of power that alternatively apply to the same person. Closing with a meditation on “Toward a Decolonial Ethics,” chapter 8 by Manuel Chávez Jr. responds to a crucial aspect of Lugones’s decolonial feminism: her call for men of color to make sense of their indifference to violence against women of color even as they proclaim themselves antiracist and decolonial activists and movement protagonists.

#### KNOWING ON THE EDGE OF WORLDS AND SENSE

There is a transitional space between worlds of sense that is both empty and fecund because it lacks the hardened meanings of dominant structures. Lugones often refers to this space as the “limen” or “borderland” and conceives of the liminal as that which holds more than one contradictory meaning at the same time, that which falls off the bounds of sense. When seen from the perspective of the coloniality of gender, readers may encounter a fruitful connection between Lugones’s notion of active subjectivity and a broader account of liminal beings. The decolonial, as it has been argued, underlines historical possibilities of resistance, of moving to dismantle the coloniality of gender. As Kelli Zaytoun discusses in chapter 2, Lugones follows Victor Turner’s account of antistructures to emphasize that liminality is both “the place where one becomes most fully aware of one’s multiplicity” and “an interstice from where one can most clearly stand critically toward different structures” (SAS 59). For a praxical thinker such as Lugones, the difficulties of communication among liminal beings are not surprising. She understands too well the risks that women of color face when they engage in the labor of deep coalition. In her more recent work, she explores the ways that the concept of liminal space can falsely implicate a communicative transparency among people whose subjectivity rests outside of dominant constructions (OC). However, insofar as we become active subjects through different journeys and struggles, there will also be multiple limens—that is, multiple spaces of resistance, multiple ways of living creatively outside dominant sense. To expect transparent communication in these spaces is thus to fall back into the structures of sense that Lugones has described as being fueled by the logics of purity and top-down views, of either/or truths, or of knowledge attained through distance and neutrality (PIS, TSC). She reminds

us that deep coalition is not necessarily coextensive with liminality; it is something that must be achieved by meeting, hearing, and seeing others face to face in their own liminal spaces, by world-traveling into and across worlds, and by attending to the ways that communication is both opened and foreclosed in these encounters.

Part IV excavates that epistemic, ethical, and affective labor of dwelling in the transformation of selves who are learning to become accountable for each other's liminal possibilities. Pedro DiPietro and Joshua Price respectively engage two concrete examples of liminality: decolonizing cognitive practices in contemporary analysis of trans\* embodiments and the death-worlds of the incarcerated. They both suggest that marginalized subjects can't take for granted each other's coalitional or empathic orientations. In chapter 9, "Beyond Benevolent Violence: Trans\* of Color, Ornamental Multiculturalism, and the Decolonization of Affect," DiPietro expands the notion of radical multiculturalism from within the affective turn (DC), introducing the notion of benevolent violence to examine how particular epistemic dispositions aimed at suppressing complexity, multiplicity, and opacity impoverish and distort racialized trans\* and transing embodiments. Chapter 10, "Travel to Death-Worlds," describes Price's encounter with the legacy of coloniality among those who live on opposite ends of the incarceration divide, troubling deep-seated patterns of apathy toward the condemned, those whom the carceral system denies selfhood, and toward the liminal worlds they inhabit.

Lugones's theorizing of political praxis as a site of deep personal and social transformation, of figuring out how to move from liminal consciousness to practice, makes important contributions to several other debates, including those in religious and Indigenous studies where they explore the limits of modern and postmodern notions of secular subjectivity. More significantly, however, it is the uptake that her teaching on the liminal may receive in queer studies where there is marked emphasis on the examination of art and performance rather than on activism and politics (Floyd 2010; Chávez 2013). Recent scholarship on *queer* social movements provides evidence that what occurs behind the scenes, in the backstage of social protest, is as important for coalitional politics as what takes place in public view (Chávez 2013; DiPietro 2015).<sup>16</sup> Some leading voices in queer studies and queer of color critique attempt to trouble typical notions of temporality with respect to unconventional political and cultural forms (Halberstam 2005; Muñoz 2009). Particularly, they criticize the neoliberal and oftentimes white supremacist pragmatics of LGBTQ rights, one that demands urgent solutions and upholds nationalist, family-centered values. Through this critique, they place the potential of

nonnormative ways in the hopes of a different utopia, a constant and reversible new dawn. A notion such as liminality has crucial consequences for that type of queer of color projects where utopianism fuels current debates. Rather than taking us to a temporality of potency, of constantly redefining many futures, liminality in the form of world-traveling or street-walker theorizing threads together multiple timelines, including coexisting constructions of selves and of who we come to be for one another. The limen is a site of concrete, body-to-body possibility rather than potency. It spans over the ongoing or continuous present tense, of learning one another, of getting a feel about one another, and of meeting in solidarity at the edge of both dominant and counterdominant sense.

#### "I WON'T THINK WHAT I WON'T PRACTICE"

Likely the most distinctive feature of Lugones's philosophy is the extent to which she refuses to separate the theoretical and the practical. Indeed, for those of us who have been trained to categorize interventions and insights as either one or the other, it takes time to learn to read Lugones's works in a way that senses their nooks and crannies—the complexity, thickness, and nuance that constitute her relentless and evolving praxical thinking. This fullness is embodied in the image and experience of the streetwalker / *la callejera*, whose spatiality Lugones invokes to illustrate the importance of navigating the social at "street-level" without the height of abstraction, without allegiance to established social norms, and without the trappings of transparency that communities of choice often evoke (TSC, ED). In her view, theorizing resistance against multiple oppressions involves physically being with one another, hanging out together, traveling to each other's worlds, speaking face to face, playfully risking one's sense of self-importance. The political work implicated in Lugones's notion of praxis is not centered on particular issues or goals, but rather "on the process and on the people involved" (PRE 14).

Many of the communities where Lugones has carried out her unique political praxis have already been mentioned: the Escuela Popular Norteña; Critical Resistance; Incite! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans People of Color Against Violence; feminist and Indigenous collectives in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, and Mexico; the Latina Feminism Roundtable; and the Philosophy, Interpretation, and Culture program (PIC) at Binghamton University. There are still many others, such as the Women of Color Caucus of the Midwest Society for Women in Philosophy (SWIP), Hispano communities of rural Northern New Mexico, and alternative schools for gang members in La Villita. The chapters in part V offer glimpses into ways that Lugones has