What’s in a Name?
Tracing the development of Latina Theologies of Their Own

In introducing the term mujerista into the field of Latina theology, Ada María Isasi-Díaz writes, “A name is not just a word by which one is identified. A name also provides the conceptual framework, the point of reference, the mental constructs that are used in thinking, understanding and relating to a person, an idea, a movement,” and, “our search for a name of our own.” Picking up on the theme of a name of one’s own, this essay will selectively trace the development of Latina theologies over the last 25 years. Most specifically it will engage Latina theologies that have incorporated a feminist hermeneutic or concern. In so doing I hope to illuminate the way in which who counts as part of ‘their own,’ and the terminology used to describe such a theology has been a source of both constructive inspiration and conflict within the field of Latina theology. In tracing these conflicts this essay will focus on the following themes: the development of a mestiza consciousness; the debate between Latina feminist theology and mujerista theology; the entrance into the field by eco-feminism, gender and queer theory; and finally both the tensions and overlaps between liberationist theologies and postcolonial theory. In response to this last concern I argue that it is the very mestiza quality of Latina theologies, which comes to the fore in the questions of inclusion and exclusion in each new naming, that insists on both liberationist and postcolonial visions. To support this argument I turn to two thinkers outside of the field of theology to exhibit ways in which liberation and postcolonialism are already alive and at work in

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2 For the purposes of this essay, Latina theologies will be defined as theologies written by self-identified Latinas and Hispanas, and which address the particularities of Latina American contexts.
3 As not being Latina myself, to speak of ‘our own,’ would be inauthentic, and as such I’ve chosen to adapt the phrase in certain points of this essay to ‘their own.’ The use of ‘their’ should be seen as a rhetorical tool and not a universal identification of all Latinas.
Latina theologies and in the communities of concern which they seek to address, whether they go named as such or not.

*Theologies at the Borderlands*

Any question of naming and identity in the Latina/o world, must grapple with the issue of mestizaje. Mestizaje in Spanish means literally mixture, and has been used to mark the identities of Latina/os who embody a mix of European Spanish blood and Indigenous blood. This concept became key for the development of Latina theologies when it was used for the construction of a new mestiza consciousness by Gloria Anzaldúa. Anzaldúa was a Chicana, poet, queer, feminist and cultural theorist. She grew up on the borderlands between Mexico and Texas, and from this formative experience developed theories and identities defined by her hybrid existence in the in-between spaces. As such, the Borderland came to represent for Anzaldúa not simply geographical borderlands, but also psychic, theoretical, and bodily ones. Out of her conceptions of the Borderland, which is, “a holistic, non-binary way of thinking and acting that includes a transformational tolerance for contradiction and ambivalence,” she further developed her conception of the new mestiza:

> For Anzaldúa, new mestizas are people who inhabit multiple worlds because of their gender, sexuality, color, class, bodies, personality, spiritual beliefs, and/or other life experiences. This theory offers a new concept of personhood that synergistically combines apparently contradictory Euro-American and indigenous traditions. Anzaldúa further develops her theory of the new mestiza into an epistemology and ethics she calls “mestiza consciousness.”

These concepts were first developed in her groundbreaking work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, published in 1987, and have been greatly influential for Latina theologies ever since.

The articulation of a new mestiza consciousness and the embrace of the Borderlands have been a source of encouragement for Latina theologians, who are often borderland peoples themselves, living away from their native lands in order to study and work in the field of theology. The new mestiza consciousness has helped Latinas to name their existence in all of its nuances, and as such played a

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5 Keating, 319-323.
significant role in several of the debates and constructions that follow. Further, as will be argued below, the recovery of the mestiza soul at the heart of much of Latina theology will be vital for its future, its ability to name itself, and to critically reflect on its own borders and boundaries.

*The Latina Feminist/Mujerista Debate*

Liberation theology had been rapidly developing in Latin America for decades beginning in the 1960s. While women were always involved in these movements, sometimes as significant support and conversation partners within the struggles for liberation, their influence was not always recognized. Additionally, while the early liberation theologies were addressing the marginal from the point of view of economics, and sometimes race, they lacked significant critique of patriarchal systems at work in the church and in the grassroots movements. In response to this blind spot, women, who were often unrecognized leaders and theologians, began explicitly addressing concerns over patriarchy and bringing feminist analyses to bear on Latin American liberation theology. This move can be seen as in conversations with various forms of feminist work happening abroad (including in the United States), but also must be recognized as coming out of internal conversations within Latin American liberation theology, and its concern for the margins.

In 1988 Isasi-Díaz along with Yolanda Tarango wrote the book, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*, one of the first major treatises on the theological and pastoral work being done by Latinas in the United States. In this work Isasi-Díaz and Tarango introduced mujerista theology. Mujer is the Spanish word for woman, and mujerista theology, is a theology whose main source is the lived experiences of Hispanic or Latina women and whose goal is liberation. In introducing her book, *En La Lucha*, Isasi-Díaz illuminates the power of naming:

> To name oneself is one of the most powerful acts any person can do: Should we call ourselves Latinas or Hispanic Women? And should those of us who struggle for our liberation call ourselves Hispanic feminists or feminist Latinas or something else? Should we call our theology

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6 The term mujerista has a deep connection to the formation of the term womanism and the tension between womanist theology and black feminist theology, which had been developing just prior and along with the mujerista/Latina feminist tensions.
It is in response to this issue of naming, and from the uncertainty of what to call the collective theological work of Latinas, that the term mujerista arose. Mujerista theology is the name Isasi-Díaz uses throughout the rest of her work to describe the kind of theo-ethical project she hopes to accomplish. Throughout her work she develops the scope and meaning of the term mujerista. She writes in *En La Lucha*, originally published in 1994, “I also became convinced that *mujerista* theology, because it is a liberative praxis must be mainly about the moral agency of Latinas—how we understand ourselves as agents of our own history, how we create meaning in and through our lives, how we exercise our moral agency in spite of the oppression under which we live.” In this way mujerista theology is embedded in what liberationists call la vida cotidiana, every day life. Its source is the quotidian struggles for liberation undertaken by Latinas.

The power and rationale behind the term mujerista becomes apparent in Isasi-Díaz’s assessment of international feminist movements. She argues that feministas Hispanics have continually been marginalized by Anglo feminist struggles and theories. Additionally, she asserts that many Latinas had come to view feminism as involved exclusively in the concerns of ‘White’ women, and as such the term was rejected outright as a marker for Latina struggles.

*Mujerista*, is Isasi-Díaz’s offering in the search for a theology of ‘their own,’ which would take up the particular (but not exclusive) concerns—those of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and community—of Latinas. Indeed, Isasi-Díaz defines her term this way, “A *mujerista* is a Hispanic Woman who struggles to liberate herself not as an individual but as a member of a Hispanic community,” and further, “is a Latina who makes a preferential option for herself and her Hispanic sisters, understanding that our struggle for liberation has to take into consideration how racism/ethnic prejudice, economic oppression,

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8 Ibid., 21
9 Isasi-Díaz 2004., 23
and sexism work together and reinforce each other.” A mujerista, then, is necessarily someone of Hispanic heritage, and not merely someone interested in or concerned with the lives of Latina women. Additionally, she is a she, and is responsible for her community as a moral agent. In this case, the ‘our own,’ at the very least is defined as Hispanic women, if not more exclusively, as critiques below suggest.

Isasi-Díaz’s concerns over the issue of naming, and of having a theology of their own, has resonated with many other Latinas, as can be seen in a round table discussion on Mujerista Theology published in 1992 in *The Journal for Feminist Studies in Religion*. For instance Elena Olazagasti-Segovia writes, “as a Hispanic woman, I find it very important to have a name of our own because we need to exist ‘officially.’ I can see why feministas hispanas was rejected; it was troublesome term from its inception…the word feminism is associated with the struggles of white middle-class Anglo women.” Further embraced is Isasi-Díaz’s assertion that the preferential option for the poor must also mean the Latina’s preferential option for herself.

Despite these deep resonances, and the groundbreaking work that a mujerista theology provides, there have also been several critiques laid at Isasi-Díaz’s feet, some of which came out in the same round table discussion. The most prominent is a critique that mujerista theology risks a kind of exclusivity or homogeneity. For instance, while affirming the need for a name of their own, Olazagasti-Segovia also warns against universalizing the Hispana experience, and so proposes that if mujerista becomes the name, it must also include surnames: mujerista puertorriquena, mujerista colombiana, etc. In this way she builds on Isasi-Díaz’s mujerista, while also exposing a potential weakness, that of sacrificing the particularities of various national identities for the sake of a universal relationship across Latina experience. Conversely, María Antonietta Berriozabal has argued, “Although Chicana feminist described one who gave high priority [to my needs as a Mexican-American woman], the term Chicana tended to

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10 Ibid.
11 Isasi-Díaz 1992, 110
12 Ibid., 114
13 Ibid., 112
separate me from my sisters who were Cuban, Puerto Rican and Central/Latin American.”

Mujerista, she asserts, gives her a term for this connection across cultures. Daisy Machado, however, worries that while its connective link is useful, mujerista, as described by Isasi-Díaz still risks leaving certain Latina women and experiences behind, indeed she says, “sitting along the road.” She writes, “On another crucial level if mujerismo is to enable Latina women to name ourselves, moving us towards self-consciousness, it must also include the acknowledgement of the reality of Protestant women, both lay and clergy. In the mujerismo that Ada Maria presents the theological voice of the Protestant Latina is absent.” At the core of these critiques is the concern already mentioned about the relationship between the particular and the universal, between who fits under the name mujerista, who counts as ‘their own,’ in Isasi-Díaz’s.

The most ardent critic of mujerista theology, María Pilar Aquino, picks up these themes of naming and universalizing. Aquino, like Isasi-Díaz is a founding mother of Latina theology as it has developed in the 20th and 21st centuries. She is prolific, widely read, and cited, and of equal influence as Isasi-Díaz. However, she often writes in direct opposition to Isasi-Díaz over precisely this issue of how to name the work, and as such mark the community of concern her Latina theology seeks to address.

Aquino’s work examines similar themes of feminism and Latina identity as Isasi-Díaz’s. For instance she seeks to construct a necessary space for the recognition of the contributions of Latinas to the field of theology, in the collection of essays, A Reader in Latina Feminist Theology, which she co-edited with Daisy L. Machado and Jeanette Rodriguez. Resonating with Isasi-Díaz’s concern over the marginalization of Latina women within Anglo feminism, Aquino writes, “The Latina feminist tradition has exposed the monocultural character of dominant Euro-American feminism. The very active myth in the minds of many scholars that feminism is nonexistent among Latinas is just that: a myth.”

14 Ibid., 118
15 Ibid., 122
16 Isasi-Díaz 1992, 121
place of convergence between Aquino and Isasi-Díaz, but it also undergirds one of Aquino’s main critiques of mujerista theology. She argues, that the response to the marginalization of Latina feminists by Anglo feminists must not be to give up the name feminist, but rather to counter the myth that feminism was ever an exclusively white enterprise, and as such bring to the fore the deep history of and interconnections within Latina feminism.

Aquino also argues, along with scholars already mentioned above, that mujerista theology risks homogenizing the Latina experience: “Throughout the continent and the Caribbean, the mujerista position is indisputably understood as an ideology rooted in both the assumption of a homogenous identity of women and a Unitarian and unifying women’s strategy for change.”18 While Isasi-Díaz, insists that the term mujerista be “alive,” and open to change,19 Aquino suggests that its mere rhetorical function does not allow for the kind of inter-culturality needed to do truly feminist and liberative work within Latina theology. Therefore, she argues explicitly for a “non-mujerista,”20 orientation, and proposes instead a Latina feminist intercultural theology. This theology uses a feminist critical approach to examine and incorporate various sources for theological construction including mestizaje, popular religion, Scripture and Magisterium, interdisciplinary studies, intercultural theories, and philosophical hermeneutics, and asserts that, “these contemporary and traditional sources must be expanded and enriched from the lived experiences of grassroot Latinas in our privileged space of la vida cotidiana.”21

This incorporation of the lived experiences of Latinas is used even more forcefully to strengthen Aquino’s emphasis on interculturality in the edited volume, Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World. This volume, published in 2007, came out of a symposium held in Mexico City in 2004. In it, Aquino performs the kind of interculturality she insists mujerista theology leaves out, including essays from Latinas across the Americas, across races, and across religious affiliations. The collection includes essays on interreligious dialogue, borderland identities, Afro-Cuban theologies, Latina

18 Aquino, Machado, and Rodríguez. 139
19 Isasi-Díaz 1992, 108
20 Aquino, Machado, and Rodríguez. 152
21 Ibid., 153
Protestantism, Black feminist Christology, indigenous spiritualities, and of course Catholic theologies. This is of utmost significance given the critique laid by Daisy Machado against mujerista theology and its focus on catholic moral theology and spiritualities. It is exactly this inter-acting within diversity that Aquino sees as the hope for a Latina theology, which seeks liberation and justice. Therefore, she insists that Feminist Intercultural Theology best names what she calls convivencia, living together across Latina identities—Catholic, Amerindian, African, Latin American, Latina—as equals in wisdom.22 This is a living together in the space of the Borderland.

While a Latina feminist intercultural theology, may address some concerns over the universalizing nature of mujerista theology, its name brings back the issue of the word feminism. Further, while Aquino’s work is premised on intermingling across borders, she has her own rigid boundaries (discussed below), and may too be leaving some Latinas sitting along the side of the road. At these borders again the question of who is ‘their own,’ and what methods can be used to decipher and name them, arises.

On Gender and Queer Bodies in Latina Theology

While explaining the kinds of intercultural wisdoms that need to be incorporated into a Latina feminist intercultural theology, Aquino also makes clear which ones do not. While recognizing how gender theory was helpful for Latina theologies in the 1990s in encouraging critiques of patriarchy, she writes that, “The greatest challenges for us today do not come from ‘gender,’ since our particular contexts do not produce ‘gender’ movements as such. Rather, our challenges come from the social, cultural, and religious structures and institutions that keep women in positions of subordination.”23 For Aquino, the focus on deconstructing the essentialized woman, primary to gender theory, does a disservice to the struggles of women living under Latin American patriarchy. Further, she feels that this focus on gender

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23 Simposio Interamericano de Teología Feminista Intercultural, Aquino, and Rosado Nuñez. xix
depoliticizes feminism and its intersections with race and ethnicity.\textsuperscript{24} She continues her critique of gender theory, saying too that it has been used to encourage the academic field of masculinity studies, which she feels further essentializes categories of femininity and masculinity. Ironically, in many ways this is exactly what masculinity studies resists and is the same claim that gender theorists have made against feminist liberationist movements. Indeed, Marcella Althaus-Reid has argued, from a Latina perspective, that the omission of gender and queer theory from Latin American liberation and feminist theologies has performed its own kind of depoliticizing and essentializing of marginalized bodies.

Althaus-Reid, draws on her roots as a poor Argentinean woman, while incorporating poststructuralist, postcolonial, queer and gender theory, in order to push beyond liberationist theologies and toward what she terms, \textit{Indecent Theology}. While not simply writing to a Latin American constituency, her work brings to life the lived realities of Latin American peoples of all genders and sexual orientations, while critiquing repressive theology inherent in both the hierarchy within the churches and the heterosexism within grassroots liberationist movements. In both, \textit{From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God} and, \textit{Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics}, Althaus-Reid takes Latin American resistance to queering and sexualizing head on. Like other Latina theologies, Althaus-Reid’s theology begins with everyday lives, however, she insists that this everyday experience always involves sexuality, a piece of the quotidian that has often been left out of la vida cotidiana as explored by theologies discussed above.\textsuperscript{25}

She writes that her theology must begin in conversation with liberation theology, but her “point of departure is the understanding that every theology implies a conscious or unconscious sexual and political praxis, based on reflections and actions developed from certain accepted codifications.”\textsuperscript{26} Hence, Althaus-Reid incorporates gender and queer theory in her theology in order to name and uncover the plurality of lived sexual experiences, and resist these accepted codifications. Unlike, Aquino’s insistence

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\item[24] Ibid., xix - xx
\item[26] Ibid.
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that gender is not of primary concern in the types of political struggles taken on by Latina feminists, and her seeming assumption that ‘gender’ is a concern of middle-class Anglo postfeminists, Althaus-Reid refuses to make such clear cuts between what is usually referred to as critical or continental theory and the lived experiences and struggles of Latinas, both middle-class and poor. In speaking of poor women who sell lemons under the bridges in Argentina, she writes, “Those lemon vendors can tell you a few things about postmodernism, for instance. Perhaps they have not heard of Liberation Theology but they know about the end of the Grand Meta-narrative, and not from reading Lyotard.”27 Similar to the way in which Aquino called for the demythologizing of an exclusively Anglo feminist history, here Althaus-Reid is arguing for the recognition of ground up Latina critical theory, of the ties between postmodern thinkers on the European continent and the lived theologies and theories of poor Latinas.

Additionally, in her application of queer theory to theology she traces how Feminist liberation theologies have sought equality within a heterosexual paradigm, and have not always sought to disrupt this paradigm and address more marginal desiring bodies. She ties this emphasis on ‘complimentarity,’ to an allergy toward engagement with critical theories: “Feminist Theology in Latin America started form the concrete experience of women, but never reached the peak of social and political gender analysis that male liberationist had in their time. Dussel read Marx and theology, but the feminists in Latin America did not.”28 To be sure, it could be argued that Marx was not the greatest proponent of nuanced gender analyses, and more importantly that to encourage any reliance on Marx and other European thinkers would rob Latina theology of its sense of ‘own-ness.’ However, Althaus-Reid’s point is more nuanced. She is arguing here for the expansion of who counts as ‘their own,’ not onto the European continent necessarily, but more so to those under the bridges, the transvestites on the street corners, or the Latinas whose sexualities are better reflected in complex incorporations of indigenous myths than in Mariology, with its virginal mother saint, whom these theories help her to name.

27 Ibid., 3
28 Althaus-Reid, 35
For Althaus-Reid, Indecent Theology is never an out-right rejection of liberation theologies, but rather as she says, “My purpose in this book is not to demolish Liberation Theology…but to explore the contextual hermeneutical circle of suspicion in depth by questioning the traditional liberationist context of doing theology. In this way the project of Indecent Theology represents both a continuation of Liberation Theology and a disruption of it.” Indeed, both Aquino and Isasi-Díaz insist on resisting heterosexist norms, and Althaus-Reid acknowledges the important work already done by feminist theologians. However, the addition of Indecent Theology, and the problems raised by it, to the field of Latina theology expands what it means to resist heterosexism and to show a preferential option for the marginal. For Althaus-Reid ignoring issues of gender beyond the critique of patriarchy’s binary split between men and women, would indeed be leaving scores of Latina/os on the side of the road.

*A Brief Sojourn Back to the Earth*

While the tension between liberationist theologies and critical continental theories will be further addressed below, it is vital in any survey of Latina theologies to acknowledge the entrance of eco-feminism into the conversation. The field of eco-feminism, which ties the concern for the flourishing of women to the concern over the flourishing of the entire Earth and all living beings therein, was not met with the same kind of out-right resistance as the critical theories just discussed. However, it has been and continues to be largely ignored. As Ivone Gebara, a prominent voice in Latina eco-feminism notes, “The Latin American theology of the last thirty years has shown relatively little interest in feminist or ecological issues… I think the Latin American context in the 1970s and 1980s, the years during which liberation theology developed, simply did not allow for the emergence of these topics.” In her seminal work, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*, Gebara draws on her experience of growing up in the urban slums of Brazil, to argue for an eco-feminist theology articulated from her particular Latina lens.

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29 Ibid., 5
In her introduction, she writes, “I see that ecofeminism is born of daily life, of day-to-day sharing among people, enduring together garbage in the streets, bad smells, the absence of sewers and safe drinking water, poor nutrition, and inadequate health care.”

Here, Gebara makes two crucial moves. On the one hand, she urges the recognition by Latina/o liberation theologies that the struggles of the poor are deeply tied to the Earth and its destruction. On the other, she reminds eco-feminists more removed from the slums of Latin America, that ecological destruction disproportionately affects those already struggling under the yoke of economic destruction. Therefore, Gebara’s work adds another layer to an inter-contextual Latina feminist theology, that of the eco-context, and argues that the liberation of the poor only comes through the liberation of the Earth out of all of the systems of oppression that are decimating both.

In this constructive work Gebara also resists “sacralizing either the world of nature or the world of women.” Rather, she seeks to use the entanglement between the lives of women and the poor with the flourishing or destruction of nature, to critically examine the ways in which theology, most particularly Christian theology, has been complicit in the destruction of the Earth and the oppression of women. Hence, Longing for Running Water can be used to argue that if any Latina theology is going to truly be about justice and liberation, it has to include the Earth as part of its “own.”

Liberation, Postcolonialism, and Decolonialism: Crossing and Creating Nominal Borders

So far, we have explored the borders crossed and constructed in each difficult attempt at naming a Latina theology of ‘their own.’ In each the goal of justice and resistance against oppressive structures have come to the fore, as have the lived experiences of particular marginalized populations variously included or excluded under different manifestations of Latina theologies. In exploring the inclusion of the Earth, a further border crossing arises. What of the other marginal peoples of the Earth, the non-Latina/os who make up the two-thirds world? How does Latina theology retain its identity as particularly Latina,

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31 Ibid., 7
32 Gebara, 13
33 Ibid., 14
and acknowledge its connection to theologies being written from the Asian and African continents, often dubbed postcolonial theologies?

Perhaps, the most pressing issues of naming in Latina theology today happen right at this borderland between liberation, postcolonial, and, more recently, decolonial theologies. It is here where today’s contestations and constructions seem to me to be the most vital. While Althaus-Reid certainly argued for the engagement between postcolonial theory and Latina theologies in her work, two younger scholars are today taking up the work in this border zone to particularly constructive and critical ends.

The first is Michelle Gonzalez, whose essay in *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* places Homi Bhabha’s discussion of hybridity into conversation with a mestiza consciousness. Throughout the essay Gonzalez recognizes both the challenges and opportunities in this engagement. She writes:

The historical manifestation of colonialism in Latin America complicates postcolonial identity constructs. Often ignored by postcolonial scholars, Spanish colonialism took a different guise form its British counterparts with their Asian orientation. Non-Latin American scholars rarely note this fact, for it contests some of the very foundations of postcolonial discourse. Latin American scholars in turn question the viability of the term *postcolonial* to describe the Latin American context.\(^{34}\)

Echoing some of the issues of exclusion and self-identification that arose above with the word feminism, Gonzalez points to the ways in which the colonization of Latin America has been, on the one hand marginalized in postcolonial studies, and on the other viewed by Latina/os as something separate and apart from British colonization. One important difference further noted by Gonzalez is the complexity of the mestiza identity, which literally embodies the blood of both colonized and colonizer.\(^{35}\) These difficulties have been reflected in the resistance of several Latina/o theologies toward the name postcolonialism. However, it is precisely this complexity that for Gonzalez becomes fruitful. For, understanding better the history of colonization in Latin America, both breaks open monolithic

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., 64
assumptions sometimes made by postcolonial theory, and provides needed vocabulary to Latina/o theologies for the interrogation of past and present conquests. This is not necessarily an argument for the inclusion of non-Latina/o postcolonial subjects into a Latina theology of ‘their own,’ but rather for the inclusion of methods that will expand interconnections with other theologies, and help to name (as queer theory does for Althaus-Reid) the complexities of the cries for inclusion that come from the margins.

Along with Gonzalez, Mayra Rivera has also provided an important theological voice, which is crossing the borders of liberationist, feminist, postcolonial, and continental theory in its articulation of Latina theologies. In her work *The Touch of Transcendence*, Rivera brings Latina/o liberation theologies, postmodern theory, and post and decolonial epistemologies to bear on the theological issue of transcendence. Rivera resists setting up postmodern theory as being against liberation theology. Rather, she writes, “Yet liberation theology complicates its portrayals of the modern and the postmodern, not by placing postmodern paradigms against those of premodernity, but by bringing other histories to bear in the modern representations of ‘modernity.’ Latin American liberation theology looks at modernity from its underside.” Liberation theology, for Rivera, indeed enacts a kind of postcolonial, or as she comes to call it later de-colonial epistemology, unraveling, from below, colonial histories and concepts passed down through conquest on to the lives and memories of Latina/os.

Again, with Rivera’s work it is not so much about who counts as in or out of Latina theologies, as about what names and theories count as in or out of its methodology. Both Rivera and Gonzalez are attempting to write theology at these methodological borderlands. They do so not to replace or legitimate Latina grassroot theologies with Western theory, rather as Althaus-Reid pointed out with the lemon vendors in Argentina, they seek to use every method available to help complicate and strengthen the theologies, which come with the various names given to Latina theologies.

One such methodology, that both have taken up in conjunction with others is the method of decolonization. In the newly released, *Decolonizing Epistemologies*, edited by Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo

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Mendieta, both Gonzalez and Rivera join Isasi-Díaz and others in discussing the opportunities for Latina/o ethics and theology, which come from decolonizing and liberating epistemologies. According to the introduction to the collection:

The essays in this book are at the intersection of two axes: liberation epistemology [which originally emerged in Latin America] and decolonizing epistemology…The decolonizing axis, a more recently developed one, emerged as a response/reaction to the way that over the last half a century most theories have synergistically conspired to exclude the non-West, the non-White, and the non-European, which means the privileging of Europeans, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, becoming-White-in-the-United-States experience.\(^{37}\)

The introduction further makes clear that decoloniality is not postcoloniality (and marks how Latino/as are dissimilar from other postcolonial subjects), nor is it the same as anticolonial struggles, because it seeks to directly engage epistemology, to decolonize ways of knowing.\(^{38}\) However, the emphasis on colonialism still remains, and, “At the center of this new epistemic matrix is an understanding of our ‘coloniality/neocoloniality.’”\(^{39}\) The rhetorical embrace of colonial terminology is key for the development of Latina theologies, which have at certain points been weary of incorporating continental theories into their theological constructions. What becomes clear in the name decolonial, is that these theories must be addressed, so that Latina theologies may decipher when they are helpful, and when Latina theologies may need to continue to seek yet another name/method.

While I find the notion of decolonization incredibly useful in opening up Latina theologies into larger conversations, while retaining their essence of “own-ness,” with the term the issues of naming and borders still arise. For instance, who is included or excluded when one speaks of Latina theologies through a decolonial lens vs. a postcolonial or anticolonial lens? What kind of difference, for good or ill, would the name intercultural postcolonial theology make? What of the name Latina feminist decolonial theology, or mujerista decolonial theology? For each name brings a cut, sometimes necessary for the life of the theology, and sometimes as a slash to the very heart of it. Hence, a fear arises that by setting


\(^{38}\) Ibid., 6-7

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 6
decoloniality up as being wholly different from postcoloniality, (which certain thinkers like Mayra Rivera Rivera refuse to do), this cutting-edge epistemic project risks breaking certain alliances across the two-thirds world, just as it is opening up other forms of allegiance. This question of allegiance is of the utmost importance in an era of mass globalization. Indeed, globalization and the challenges it brings may provide the greatest opportunities for the field of Latina theology. And, it is here where outer- and interdisciplinary sources may become most particularly useful.

The Future of Latina Theologies: At the End, the Beginning

In looking forward toward new Latina theological horizons, I find myself looking back to where we began. It seems to me that Anzaldúa’s understanding of the new mestiza—a rooted and yet never-stable, constantly border-crossing mode of being—is at the heart of Latina theology and also a guide for its future. It is useful to turn to two non-theologians to see how this border crossing may become particularly fruitful in a neo-colonial, neo-imperial, and globalized world.

In her seminal work, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval, incorporates Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness for just this kind of deconstructive and reconstructive border crossing. While Sandoval’s work is not new—and has been used by many of the theologians discussed above--faced with new debates about continental theory and liberation, postcoloniality and decoloniality, and ever more questions about what counts as anyone’s ‘own,’ Sandoval’s scholarship is ever more relevant today. In introducing her methodology she writes:

> This study shows that no canonical Western thought is free of de-colonial effects. Whether we read the work of Fredric Jameson, Roland Barthes, Hayden white, Donna Haraway, Jacques Derrida, or Judith Butler, we will see how each writing contains the decolonizing influences of what is defined in this book as postcolonial U.S. third world feminist criticism—in other words, these works contain lines of force and affinity necessary in matrixing a decolonizing globalization that is no longer necessarily ‘postmodern.’ Questions such as, What is Western? What is ‘third world’? What is ‘first’? deconstruct under the weight of this analysis—which reconstructs theory and method to create a new vision and world of though and action, of theory and method, of alliance.⁴⁰

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The exposure of matrixes and the construction of alliances is at the heart of a mestiza consciousness, which seeks not harsh cuts and fenced borders, but a critical reading of the crossings and mixtures within those borders. Indeed, here Sandoval uses references to de-colonial theory, third-world feminism, postcoloniality, and deconstruction without ever conflating any of the terms, nor setting any up as oppositional straw wo/men. This is the kind of move that should exemplify theologies of the borderlands, and as such should be, and has been to varying degrees, a focus of Latina theologies. This methodology of the oppressed, allows for a multiplicity of names, without ever fully over-writing any, as it works to deconstruct and reconstruct within the matrixes between and of the names.

This matrix and alliance building too brings us back to the every day, which has become increasingly globalized. Hence, Latina theology, while embracing its mestiza heart will also need to continue to embrace its vida cotidiana, but it may need to do so on a global scale. For instance, in her ethnographic study of NGOs addressing the struggles of women in Latin America sociologist Milagros Peña argues that through examining, “Latina communities in a transnational context, we better understand women’s mobilization, how they become agents of social change, and how they are shaping our feminist future.”41 Similarly, Aquino has recently argued that the future of feminist theology will reside in the field of peace and conflict studies, advocating for a transnational theological exploration of global and local warfare and the resources for healing and harm within theology.42 In both these cases, it becomes evident that the effects of the every-day struggles of Latina women have gone global, and conversely that the global has penetrated their vidas cotidianas.

Hence, a methodology of alliance, a decolonial epistemology, a postcolonial hermeneutic, and a mestiza consciousness will be necessary for any theologies which seek a preferential option for oneself and one’s sisters within liberating praxes for a globalized world. A theology of “our own,” both for

Latinas, and those of us in struggles beyond the Latin American context, will need to name us particularly, but also to connect us ever more globally.

Works Cited


