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WOMEN AND CARE: DISPUTES AND NEGOTIATIONS IN ACADEMIC SPACE

-  Ana María Rosas Rodríguez^I
 Mariana Valderrama Leongómez^{II}
 Carlos Andrés Alberto Suárez^{III}
 TRANSLATED BY Katharine H. West^{IV}

^I Universitaria Agustiniiana, Bogotá, Colombia; ana.rosas@uniagustiniana.edu.co

^{II} Universitaria Agustiniiana, Bogotá, Colombia; mariana.valderrama@e-campus.uab.cat

^{III} Universitaria Agustiniiana, Bogotá, Colombia; carlos.alberto@uniagustiniana.edu.co

^{IV} Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá, Colombia; katyhwest@gmail.com

Abstract

This article offers both empirical and theoretical resources that demonstrate how the link between space and gender operates in academic life in social sciences and humanities in Bogotá, Colombia. By examining ten life stories of women who work in different universities, we affirm that academia is a hostile space for the women who inhabit it, as it reproduces dualist, colonial, hetero-patriarchal and capitalist logics within it; these particularly affect the experiences of women and non-heteronormative bodies. Care is found to be a central and conflictive notion in this experience of academia, as it operates both as a form of oppression, by nullifying women's participation and visibility, and as a form of resistance, negotiation and political power to transform the university.

WORK • UNIVERSITY • GENDER RELATIONS • WOMEN

MUJERES Y CUIDADO: DISPUTAS Y NEGOCIACIONES EN EL ESPACIO ACADÉMICO

Resumen

El presente artículo ofrece insumos, tanto empíricos como teóricos, que evidencian cómo opera el vínculo entre el espacio y el género en la academia de ciencias sociales y humanidades de Bogotá, Colombia. A través de 10 historias de vida de mujeres que trabajan en distintas universidades, afirmamos que la academia es un espacio hostil para las mujeres que la habitan, en tanto que se reproducen en su interior lógicas dualistas, coloniales, heteropatriarcales y capitalistas, que afectan de manera particular las experiencias de mujeres y cuerpos no heteronormativos. Encontramos que el cuidado es una noción central y conflictiva en dicha experiencia de la academia, pues opera tanto como forma de opresión, al anular la participación y visibilidad de las mujeres, como de resistencia, negociación y potencia política para transformar la universidad.

TRABAJO • UNIVERSIDAD • RELACIONES DE GÉNERO • MUJER

MULHERES E CUIDADO: DISPUTAS E NEGOCIAÇÕES NO ESPAÇO ACADÊMICO

Resumo

O presente artigo oferece insumos tanto empíricos quanto teóricos que evidenciam a forma como opera o vínculo entre o espaço e o gênero na academia de ciências sociais e humanas de Bogotá, Colômbia. Com base em dez histórias de vida de mulheres que trabalham em diferentes universidades, afirmamos que a academia é um espaço hostil para as mulheres que o habitam, pois em seu interior são reproduzidas lógicas dualistas, coloniais, heteropatriarcais e capitalistas, que afetam de maneira particular as experiências de mulheres e corpos não heteronormativos. Verificamos que o cuidado é uma noção central e conflituosa nessa experiência acadêmica, pois opera tanto como forma de opressão, ao anular a participação e a visibilidade das mulheres, quanto como de resistência, negociação e potência política para transformar a universidade.

TRABALHO • UNIVERSIDADE • RELAÇÕES DE GÊNERO • MULHERES

FEMMES ET SOIN : COMPETITIONS ET NEGOCIATIONS DANS LE CONTEXTE UNIVERSITAIRE

Résumé

Cet article offre des données empiriques aussi bien que théoriques qui mettent en évidence comment fonctionne le lien entre l'espace et le genre dans le contexte universitaire de sciences sociales et humaines de Bogota, Colombie. A l'appui de dix histoires de vie de femmes qui travaillent dans différentes universités, on affirme que l'académie est un espace hostile aux femmes, car à son intérieur se reproduisent des logiques dualistes, colonialistes, capitalistes et heteropatriarcales qui affectent de façon particulière les expériences des femmes et des corps non heteronormatifs. On a vérifié que le soin est une notion centrale et conflictuelle dans cette expérience académique, car elle opère comme mode d'oppression, lorsqu'on annule la participation et la visibilité des femmes, aussi bien que comme résistance, négociation et force politique pour transformer l'université.

TRAVAIL • UNIVERSITÉ • RELATIONS DE GENRE • FEMMES

FEMINIST GEOGRAPHY HAS BEEN ORIENTED AROUND MAKING THE MUTUALLY CONSTITUTIVE

relationship between gender divisions and spatial divisions visible, a relationship that had previously been assumed to be neutral and natural. Notwithstanding, despite the enormous advances that feminisms and the transformation of the social sciences have made in order to break down these assumptions, the dualist logic that constitutes the Western episteme and, therefore, the academic institution itself, continues to maintain working structures, both on a symbolic and material level. This article will offer empirical and theoretical resources to demonstrate how the link between space and gender operates in academia through the notion of care, especially in the social sciences and humanities in Bogotá, Colombia. We maintain that academia as a space is supported by a dualist, colonial, heteropatriarchal and capitalist logic that is materialized in the diverse meanings of care exercised on women and on non-heteronormative bodies.

This research approach is only incipient in Colombia and Latin America. However, in Brazil we can find research related to our proposal, such as that by Marina Cordeiro. She proposes reviewing the experiences of social scientists to highlight gender inequalities in the work and family life balance, as well as their impact these cause on their academic careers (CORDEIRO, 2015). Likewise, Rodrigo De Oliveira's journalism demonstrates the negative impact of motherhood on Brazilian academic women (DE OLIVEIRA, 2018). Although this topic is not the precise focus of our research, we still mentioned it as an important consideration. Likewise, research along similar lines has also taken place in Chile (RÍOS; MANDIOLA; VARAS, 2017) and Peru (KISS; BARRIOS; ÁLVAREZ, 2007). The former addresses the way in which gender is constructed in the organization of academic work in Chile, considering academic trajectories involved with feminist activism. The latter analyzes the power-knowledge relationship in the university context of the Universidad de Los Lagos.

That said, we will approach our thesis from the consideration of the life stories of 10 women, who all work at various higher education institutions in Bogota, Colombia, specifically in faculties of social sciences and humanities. We built a narrative cartography that allows us to propose the following stages. Firstly, we see how academia demands that women continually prove their abilities as they are assumed to be irrational, weak, incapable girls and, therefore, inferior subjects, moored to the emotional and needing male care. We also consider that the mass production of academic publications is a *neglected* field, as, due to the colonial dualist logic, utility and speed are privileged over bodies. Accordingly, in a second phase, we see how women negotiate, resist and transform practices within academia as a space and as an intellectual exercise that promotes care as a possibility of intervention and, thus, how they strengthen the political imagination necessary in the conception of a different university.

METHODOLOGY

We use feminist epistemology as a research approach, as it considers knowledge as always situated (HARAWAY, 1995), and interwoven with political interests. Likewise, it questions patterns of gender inequality, such as epistemic authority structures to determine how gender influences the production of knowledge. We situate ourselves in what Harding (1996) calls "strong objectivity," based on the particular experiences of 10 women who agreed to tell us their life stories in academia. Equally, we included the stories of the two women researchers of this project. These women range

in age from 28 to 50, and work in the humanities and social sciences at university level. We have omitted our interviewees' real names as well as those of the institutions where they work to protect their employment status.

The heterogeneous nature of the women interviewed in terms of their ethno-racial origin is marked by the absence of Afro-descendant women. The low percentage of Indigenous women, only one interviewee, is also noteworthy. This is partly due to the low and almost non-existent number of Afro-descendant and Indigenous women in academia in the Colombian capital. Furthermore, exclusionary logics are perpetuated that keep these populations on the margins and excluded from the circles of knowledge and power (VIVEROS, 2016).

This observation constitutes a naturalized pattern of exclusion, which continues historical and social processes of racial discrimination that have been both perpetuated and embodied in cultural and epistemic processes of exclusion (LAMUS, 2009). It leads to a complexity that has been successfully addressed by the feminist intersectionality approach and helps to explain the low participation and representation of Afro-descendant and Indigenous women in academic circles. An absence that coincides in Latin America with dynamics of exclusion of women (RIBEIRO, 2017; CARNEIRO, 2003; CARNEIRO, 2019; GONZALEZ, 1998, FONSECA; GUZZO, 2018).

We chose to use life histories as a methodological tool because it “provides a reading of the social through the reconstruction of language, in which thoughts, desires and the unconscious itself are expressed” (PUYANA; BARRETO, 1994, p. 187). In this sense, our research has a narrative autoethnographic approach, understood as a:

An autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience: then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by, and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. (ELLIS; BOCHNER, 2000, p. 739)

In this regard, feminist autoethnography understands that “there is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal” (BORDO, 2001, p. 36), meaning that the self's movement through the cultural system in which it moves and resists is central to autoethnographic research. Thus, in the interest of connecting the personal with the public, we constructed a narrative map using feminist geography through these 10 life stories that seeks to trace “lines of force, lines of group affections, lines of fissures or gaps” (PERLONGHER, 1996, p. 66) that are entangled, interwoven, broken, superimposed and that produce the spatiality of our existences, always bearing in mind that:

Space overflows [...] its geographical framework and becomes a concept that refers to the notions of autonomy and identity, and also to the concomitant social practices in which individual problems are brought to the collective and public level and, therefore, to that of civil responsibility.¹ (KARSTEN; MEERTENS, 1992, p. 188, own translation)

We begin then by thinking that spaces are co-constitutive of social processes. In other words, they are an integral part of the production of identities, and are also a product of that very process

1 In the original: “El espacio desborda [...] su marco geográfico y se convierte en un concepto que remite a las nociones de autonomía e identidad, y también a las prácticas sociales concomitantes en que problemas individuales son llevados al plano colectivo y público y, por lo tanto, al de la responsabilidad civil.”

(MASSEY, 2012). In this regard, collecting life stories to build a narrative map not only allows us to aware of women's experiences, but also to characterize academic space. Rather than setting limits and stabilizing processes for their homogenization, we appeal for mobility and the emergence of a political commitment to make contacting oppression and hierarchization in academia possible.

ACADEMIA, GENDER AND COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE

As our interest is directed towards thinking about the links between gender and space, it is necessary to refer to the criticism that has been made of the ideological construction of space as neutral, stripped of its historicity, social and political nexus. This traditional conception of space as neutral has been founded on two prejudices. The first one is the illusion of transparency. Space is seen as innocent, and completely transparent to human understanding. The second prejudice is the realistic illusion, which conceives of space as agreed upon and defined in pure materiality (RANADE, 2007).

This physical vision of space tends to imbue all things spatial with two illusions: objectivity and reification. But space is not only the set of material constructions, it also is a determining factor of identity. Different bodies experience space in different ways, depending on their gender, class, age, nationality, and physical ability. Therefore, access to space is socio-culturally determined. Geographers now understand space as conflicting, fluid, and unsafe. Space is defined by “the socio-spatial practices, the social relations of power and exclusion; that is why spaces overlap and intertwine and their limits are varied and mobile” (MASSEY, 1991; SMITH, 1993², cited by MCDOWELL, 2000, p. 72).

In this regard, we understand academia as a space determined by the relationships that have been established between the subjects who inhabit it. Therefore, it operates as a place of creation and recreation of gender identities, which are incorporated in bodies, in sexuality, as well as in labor practices. In other words, determining the central features of present-day academic work becomes necessary, as well as practices of gender production and reproduction in academia.

Boaventura de Sousa emphasizes that “the dominant Western epistemology was built on the needs of capitalist and colonial domination” (2010, p. 8). This implies the creation of a dividing line of social reality that he calls abysmal thinking; useful, intelligible and visible knowledges are found on one side of the line, while on the other side the unintelligible ones, considered to be useless in the service of domination and capital, are to be found. As long as knowledge is not produced and applied in isolation, the subjects who originate such knowledge also remain located on one side or the other of the hierarchical system.

Western academia, which includes Colombian universities, has historically been characterized by strengthening and reproducing both general scientific systems and expert knowledges that are “on this side of the line.” The disciplinary division of knowledge and rationality as a legitimate way to access and produce knowledge are just two of the various aspects that materialize that abysmal dividing line. This constant appeal to knowledge and rationality, in addition to the claim of universal and total truth, typical of such disciplines, have systematically relegated some knowledges and some subjects, whose very characteristics are rejected by such claims. Restrepo, (following Grosfogel), has named this hierarchical and divisive order the ‘coloniality of knowledge,’ which “is constituted by a pattern of global classification and hierarchization of knowledge, in which some knowledges appear as the embodiment of authentic and relevant knowledge, while other knowledge is expropriated, inferiorized and silenced” (RESTREPO, 2018).

2 SMITH, Neil. Homeless/global: scaling places. In: BIRD, John; CURTIS, Barry; PUTMAN, Tim; TICKNER, Lisa (ed.). *Mapping the futures: local cultures, global change*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Walsh (2005, p. 19³, cited by RESTREPO, 2018) discusses how a particular subject is introduced with the coloniality of knowledge; a subject who is directly linked to “legitimate” knowledge and assumed to be True. This subject is the white, European, scientific subject who, according to Maria Lugones (2010), has a particular sex and gender that radically change the place where he is located within the structure. Lugones (2010), in a dialogue with Quijano (2002), clearly states how gender and race are colonial categories that “follow a logic of mutual constitution: both ‘race’ and ‘gender’ are powerful and interdependent fictions that constituted the success of the enterprise of the modern/colonial capitalist and heteropatriarchal system” (FONSECA; GUZZO, 2018, p. 72).

The Master in Western Culture (PLUMWOOD, 1993) builds his identity from a set of attributes headed by rationality, mind, spirit, masculinity, culture, civilization and production, among many others. These dualisms

[...] are key ones for western thought, and reflect the major forms of oppression in western culture. In particular the dualisms of male/female, mental/manual (mind/body), civilised/primitive, human/nature correspond directly to and naturalise gender, class, race and nature oppressions respectively. (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 43)

Thus, attributes such as civilization, what is public, rationality and culture are linked to the masculine to constitute *The Master* of Western thought; all the while leaving the feminine, and *non-white* people associated with the primitive, emotional, bodily, natural, domestic, household care, and therefore, unable to produce valid scientific knowledge. As Segato comments “everything related to the domestic scene is emptied of its politicization” (2016, p. 20).

In that regard, it is possible to see “colonized females” only in the convergence of the oppressions of gender, class and “race” (FONSECA; GUZZO, 2018) and, therefore, how academia, itself, contributes to the sustainability of such oppressions in time. We recognize what Curiel (2014) calls consubstantiality, by showing that these categories and oppressions are not isolated spheres of experience but rather they share a common element, which is domination. The domination of race, class, gender and ethnicity are not only complex, plural and contextually framed in each woman’s experience; their very experiences are, likewise, profoundly spatial.

Below, we will see how these representations of gender actually materialize in their profound overlapping with the experiences of class, race and ethnicity in the co-construction of academia as space. We divide the analysis into two steps. In the first stage we work in two interconnected spheres: one that is constituted by the material and epistemological implications of the idea that women do not produce the same kind of rational, objective, hierarchical, disciplinary, disembodied knowledge as their male colleagues and, therefore, are incapable and infantilized subjects. The second sphere involves how the need for mass scientific production has affected these women’s experience, causing, amongst other consequences, the neglect of the body, of one’s own life and of knowledge itself. In a second stage we deal with how academia is also a place of negotiation in which heteropatriarchal logics coexist and how they are juxtaposed with forms of resistance and dispute.

3 WALSH, Catherine. Interculturalidad, colonialidad y educación. Presentation at the First International Seminar “(Etno)educación, multiculturalismo e interculturalidad” [(Ethno)education, multiculturalism and Interculturality], Universidad del Cauca [University of Cauca], November 1 to 4, 2005.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

DEMONSTRATE, DEMONSTRATE AND DEMONSTRATE: PRODUCE, PRODUCE AND PRODUCE

[...] It's up to you to prove, to almost impose yourself right there to say like "no, I'm not boneheaded" Right? Just because, it's so common! It's just assumed that like "you're a girl, you're half daft".
(Marina)

The representation of women as emotional, domestic subjects, who are, therefore incapable of producing rational knowledge has been naturalized. It emerges from the constant need for show that it is outlined in the voices of our interviewees as a meeting point. These women feel a constant need to fight, to justify and to prove that they *deserve* the place they are in. They have, as Daniela O. points out, "*to do twice as much work as men*". She also experiences a constant struggle against other types of stereotypes that contribute to the idea that women reach high positions in academia, not only because of their knowledge or abilities, but also because of their emotional ties with their male peers. As Laura points out:

It's up to you to prove all the time that you can, you know. There is a tendency to think that you can't do things or that you don't know, or that you have a certain responsibility because you have something with the director, or because you are a lame duck, and not because you are competent.

Questioning the success of women is one of the most important elements in developing the idea of constant need for show that is demanded of women in academia. By assuming that they "naturally" have no capabilities, *other* types of factors are considered to intervene in their careers. They, thusly, become invisible as subjects, as they are validated only in terms of their relationships with men. Catalina's voice shows this clearly: "*once, a great authority in Constitutional Law told us clearly in class, in lectures, 'well, ladies, find a husband quickly to see if you can free up positions'*" (Catalina).

Thus, women in academia are directly linked to their need to get a husband in the imagination of some, invalidating their own personal and professional interests from the start. The gender representation of women as homemakers and wives, and, therefore, as academically incapable, is still present. As Dana A. comments:

I had a sentimental, loving relationship with a professor who was many years older than me [...] he was a professor of mine at the university and now I think that type of relationship needs to be rethought as it has a lot to do with how you are seen as a woman in academia. I was seen as "someone's girl".

As we can see, such examples show how women's credibility is directly determined by their relationships with men, obliging them to demonstrate their intellectual and personal capacities in order to gain credibility and visibility. However, sentimental relationships are not the only way in which this stereotype is materialized. Our interviewees agree that there is another type of relationship with male peers that they must combat to gain credibility: infantilization. Infantilization, fallaciously passing as a practice of care, actually prevents women from being presumed to be respectable academic interlocutors. In this respect, Maria del Mar comments:

One of the things that always stood out to me was that, doubtlessly, Jorge treated me, more than like his assistant than like a star student, and while that wasn't bad, he very clearly had an attitude almost like that of a grandfather, he was very paternal, very loving, very concerned, and this was something I saw him do with me – but not with my male colleagues.

It is believed that treating women 'nicely' is a form of care, as it is conceived as soft, sweet and, therefore, as positive. Notwithstanding, these forms of treatment are actually intended to undermine women's possibilities of becoming men's peers and they are really underground methods of maintaining a superior status. The danger lies in the fact that many women accept such practices in order to be able to move around without hindrance.

However, it is problematic that such practices of care tend to put women between a rock and a hard place: either we are incapable of producing knowledge as we are 'natural' caregivers and we should just look for husbands as caregivers we must solve men's issues *or* we are simply incapable, and men must take care of us and we are always in the shadows, as eternal girls. As Daniela O. says "women in academia are not valid interlocutors; we always have to fight for our place, our [male] colleagues are looking for secretaries, or mothers, someone to solve their life". In any case, the care that is wielded over or demanded from the women's actions always results in harming them, either because it produces invisibility, infantilization, or a work overload. The existence of a notion of care, as used and practiced by some men, is clearly nothing more than the clear reflection of the patriarchal system itself and the sexual division of labor, in which the stereotype of women as weak and inferior reappears. We are firmly opposed to this type of care.

Notwithstanding, when faced with the effects of these gender representations, many women in academia tend to masculinize themselves. Masculinization helps them avoid being transformed into representations of mothers, husband-hunters, assistants, secretaries, or girls. According to Laura:

There are many women in academia who end up masculinizing themselves in a certain sense in order to, let's say, fit in! So if you don't manage to, let's say, speak up or speak out, get tough, be an ogre which is what we see many of them becoming, then they're going to say, "she's daft, she doesn't know".

This perspective would suggest that becoming masculine means assuming aggressive ways of treating others, speaking with exaggerated gestures and a loud voice, being pedantic, dismissive, rude and hierarchical. It also means silencing doubts, as well as not showing any intellectual weakness for fear of being considered *lesser* than. As Dana A. comments:

I could not show that I didn't understand something, right? That would make me look ignorant or no good; like I didn't know what I was saying. Instead of seeing it as an inquiring attitude inquiry and demonstration of, I don't know, of my own limitations, my own ignorance.

However, there are also cases in which women who decide to speak out, who have a strong opinion are associated with exaggeration and the generation of conflict or hysteria. As Daniela O. commented:

I feel that there are many things that one can say if one is a man, but if one is a woman, it becomes all ah, she is very complicated; you know, you're problematic, it's always about you; there's always something. On the other hand, men are assertive, they are leaders, no, "He's just like that", "he stands up for himself", "he takes strong positions", on the other hand, when I say it, it is like "how dare she say that?".

Masculinization implies a passive attitude towards gender stereotypes and their effects, and is based, rather, on women who participate in the perpetuation of such stereotypes. Catalina shares another clear example that reinforces the complex place of masculinization:

Well, are you going to teach in such a scenario? You have to know that these people are very conservative, you have to, like, say 'don't be feminist steamroller' like, for example, "Oh, Catalina, you have to dial it down", In other words, being a woman with a strong character, a woman who doesn't minimize her opinions, a woman who has great argumentative force, is read through the prism of feminism, not through who I am. I believe that the comments would be the same, starting from the microsexism, of "ay, she's half-panther", "uy no, she's a beast".

Meanwhile women who make loud claims and argue with the stereotype are accused of being panthers, or being hysterical, or even feminazis. Women who opt for masculinization repeat this line of thought to their colleagues. As Margarita says, being 'more masculine' means "walking around all the time, cutting and punching." This would suggest that it is an unstable resource used by some women in selected cases and at certain stages in order to claim their place. However, this strategy ignores the care of others, while it simultaneously hinders the development of collaborative and community work, as the following case would demonstrate:

A boy raped two students on two different occasions. The first one happened when they were classmates on a field trip, while the second one happened, later on, when he was my researcher. This last rape was the same as the other one, so when I found out, I told this guy to go to hell and I took him off the project and out of the publication. I also withdrew my letters of recommendation and he lost his scholarship to go and do his doctorate. But the person who came looking for me is my colleague, a woman researcher I've been working with for five years, and she's all like, 'don't stick your nose in where it doesn't belong, he's my star student, he gives me publications, so don't butt into my business,' and I was like no, no, no, what happens in the field is none of your business. (Daniela O.)

In the interest of keeping up publishing, the researcher in question is willing to forget the fact that her star student raped two classmates during field trips that she was leading. This is a clear example of how academia promotes practices that do not consider how care and how these practices are linked and are interwoven with the very academic production demanded by these same universities. This 'publish or perish' requirement for academic production may even be given priority, as can be seen in the case above which is perhaps the most extreme. Notwithstanding, there are many other ways this motivation to be hyper-productive academically is exemplified and materialized. Indeed, it should provoke a necessary reflection not only as to the type of production that takes place, but also as to the very work conditions in academia in capitalist production. According to Carmen:

One is atomized into thousands of activities, activism, and there is no space for thinking, thinking is slow, it's ruminating! So, for me that has been disastrous because you want other rhythms and also because doing good things in ten months is very difficult! And ten months that are not ten months, because if you quantify in time, it's as if you had researched over just three months, because the rest of the time you are commuting, giving classes, attending meetings, attending bullshit things and dealing with bullshit because doing things takes precedence over not doing things.

This imperative of production, of producing short-term results, of doing for the sake of doing, has invaded every corner of life and institutions. It has, produced precisely a violence of the subject not just over others but also over oneself by reducing the political possibilities of intellectual work. As Manuela points out:

If academia had another logic, a logic other than eagerness and success for a successful career. Now, we have to do everything quickly! And publish any bullshit! [...] I would love to be able to do better work, to have more political responsibility, deeper, longer research projects!

This idea of success, of production, of speed, generates ways of being in academia that give priority to competitiveness and result in shallow and meaningless research products. As Dana A. says: “they make academia very backward! To think from the present, to think in situated ways and be aware of our places of enunciation and the social and political conditions that allow us to think our world”.

This backward academia has insisted on privileging the massive production of research, regardless of the types of relationships that are produced in the very production of said research and knowledge. It is also indifferent to the situations in which those bodies actually produce such knowledge. As Margarita says:

It is a heteropatriarchal model, to put it in those terms. It has penetrated the whole world, right? it has colonized our whole way of living! This mechanism of individuality puts personal projects over community ones, and it has entered the most violent bureaucracy's every circuit in every institution - including academia.

Inhabiting the space of academia implies a certain disembodiment, an oblivion of the body, of well-being, of community and care. In so many places dedicated to the production of knowledge, this disembodiment has been added to bureaucracy and, therefore, has become materialized in a differential way for men and women. In the case of women, one of the clearest consequences is plainly the possibility of maternity and childcare. Maternity turns out to be an obstacle to production and (academic) reproduction. In this respect, says Maria del Mar:

I remember very clearly in a meeting we had during the doctorate, they were complaining because the dropout rate was very high! It was scandalously high! It was around 70% and the 'doctors' were taking on average sixteen semesters to graduate when the program was only eight! What was this nonsense? and so on; and a couple of classmates raised their hand and say 'come on, let me tell you something, I'm a mom, I have two kids, or one kid, or whatever, and I'll take as long as I'll take!

Having children is, thusly, an obstacle for women who want to build an academic career. The mothers in the group of women interviewed had been subjected to negative comments because they had decided to have children. Daniela O., for example, was told by other women that she was an idiot, that she had committed academic suicide, and that she had destroyed her heretofore bright future. Laura was told by her thesis advisor that she was delaying her finishing her doctorate because she was having a child. She should really push herself to rush things if she wanted to graduate quickly. She, herself, asks, “what does this mean? If you want to go into academia, you can't have children? Or do you have to put that off until when it's possible?” Later on, she says, “I mean, for them the ideal academic woman is a single woman with no children” (Laura).

At this point, it is important to ask who are the “they” that Laura refers to. Who are the people who prefer a woman without obstacles? Women without children or partners? Women who

do not even have a body? All just so she can inhabit academic space. Without a doubt, this “they” is related to people who say to her, to Daniela O., and to so many other women, that they are despised for having had children, because having children is an obstacle for the production of knowledge. But this “they,” although it includes people, including women, is an incarnation of precisely these heteropatriarchal logics. The consideration of work as something that is done outside the home, that it is something a heterosexual man does for his professional success and to support his family. That consideration is a trace of differentiation, a trace of a heteropatriarchal logic that still endures today, and that is embodied by women and men.

This trace of differentiation of bodies, both productive and non-productive, is also evident in the hierarchization, both of the people who inhabit academia and of knowledges themselves. It is striking that in the academic spaces forms of differentiation appear between those who are “intelligent or stupid,” those who choose certain fields of study in their own disciplines, or, indeed, those who live in the north or in the south of the city.

On the one hand, according to Maria del Mar at the public university where she studied, there were the students who had left Uncoli colleges⁴, the ‘gomelos’ [or posh kids] who were generally the star students of the department, while the students who had studied at the District public schools who lived in Usme, Kennedy or Bosa had more difficulty matching the star students because the conditions at *their* high schools had generated significant academic deficiencies. She points out that, in that same department, the members who inhabit it distinguish between those who undertake serious philosophies because they are intelligent and those who undertake light and nonsensical philosophies because they are not quite so intelligent. In Rebecca’s words:

In other aspects, then, obviously I felt bad at university, because I realized that I had arrived there with many learning limitations, perhaps because I did not have the knowledge that the university expected me to have within the entire curriculum design that they had made for the program, so, for example, I had university friends who came from private schools, from bilingual schools, who had already traveled, who had left the country and had traveled everywhere, while it was my first time out of town.

This shows the very marked hierarchies among the people who live in Colombian academia. But there are also other distinctions within it, for example, in terms of knowledge and know-how. Catalina states that she considers Law to be a patriarchal construction, María del Mar considers it relevant to underline that many courses she took when she was a student had no bibliography by women. Dana A. points out how purisms and differentiations between disciplines are produced. In her words, “*the most harmful thing, at least in my field, is purism! So are the lack of openness to dialogue and interdisciplinarity and encountering political and social reality*”.

ACADEMIC SPACE AS A PLACE OF NEGOTIATION

Negotiation is the process of developing understanding with other people and bodies that have interests, intentions, ways of seeing and conceiving the world. Ways that are, in many occasions, diametrically opposed to ours and clash with our own perception. Negotiation does not only involve creating understandings with *people*, but also with *spatialities* that appear already to have been rigidly constituted. However, negotiation processes mean new determinations are affirmed and articulated, demands are proposed, and identities are imposed. They would also imply that material and intellectual things are renounced while others are conquered and imposed.

⁴ Translator’s note: Uncoli is a network of expensive private schools that tend to offer a bilingual education program, usually in English.

Negotiation processes mean that spaces are configured and renewed and are given their dynamic and changing character (MCDOWELL, 2000).

To understand the meaning of this negotiation, one of our interviewees states the following: “*I feel that it is not that the spaces already exist, but that rather one builds them*” (Daniela O.). One would “arrive by taking” the space in order to make it something different from what it is. This statement points to the possibility that there are other ways of inhabiting academia. In other words, the panorama described above is not fixed and immutable, even if it is powerful. However, unlike Daniela O., we consider that such spaces already exist in some regard, especially as one takes academia itself in order to transform it into something that it already is, but could be otherwise.

Negotiation, in this way, constitutes the spaces. The interviewed women point out how academic space operates and builds on characteristics that are typical of inherited colonial, heteropatriarchal and capitalist logics. However, academia becomes one of the places where women, in this case, fight, resist or modify spatiality itself. Delving further into this idea, none of the women interviewed claimed to want to leave academia, change their life or their professional project. In the words of Marina “*in any case, I really love academia because for me it is like a place of freedom*” (Marina) or of Daniela O. “*I feel that academia well, I feel that I also owe it a lot, I feel that academia somehow saved my life, that’s why I continue and insist on it*”. Rebeca also refers to something similar:

I believe that the university itself, or what happened to me at the end of my degree, showed me that there is a cooler path to follow, right? that it is the same academia, the university; I believe that we can generate many things from, from here, from here, from the university, right? it taught me to dream much more.

But how does such negotiation work? One way is the building of spaces on the edge. The most notable example of this idea can be found in Marina’s life history, as it reflects how non-institutionalization allowed a space of freedom to think and explore problems that challenged her. The creation of these spaces, turned out to emerge as a response to traditional academia and to traditional ways of accessing knowledge. She travelled “*through places that were not places.*” According to Marina:

This Independent Studies program appeared and it was like that again, that is, it was like graduate diploma course recharged! As, once again, it was also like a program, with pros and cons with the fact that it was not institutional, its pros, it was just wonderful, it was a program like that, really just like it in terms of vitality and power.

The vitality and power produced in those non-institutionalized spaces open up the possibilities of inhabiting academia in different way and, moreover, question academia itself with regard to its modes of procedure. But those ‘spaces on the edge’ are also non-conventional spaces within the university. Margarita points out how at one point in the history of the faculty where she works, there was a seminar of professors where they met to have philosophical discussions of different kinds and from different traditions. For Margarita:

I believe that this generated a lot of bonding, because one learns a lot of respect and because I don’t know, but I do believe in this, Plato is right and that is that Philosophy makes friends, right, there is a joy and there is an interaction that is wonderful! When that joy disappears and the interactions become more concrete, and tasks that have to be fulfilled, yes, in other type of more procedural, more operative aspects, I believe that that’s where the weeds grow!

In Catalina's case, in the area of law, she stumbled across a non-conventional volunteer program called *Opción Colombia* [Option Colombia]. "It was a program to do social practices in places, let's say, that are very remote in Colombia, where people and municipalities could not pay for qualified labor". In Catalina's opinion, this program saved her relationship with the law; it became another way of inhabiting that discipline. On the other hand, the Institute where Daniela O. works is also a space on the edge, inhabited mostly by feminists and by different professional backgrounds. For Daniela O.:

The Institute is a divine environment! I am happy to work there, I feel cared for, I feel that anything, I mean, if the girl [her daughter] gets sick and I know she can connect me through Skype! But at the University it is not like that, that is, the Institute is the exception to a rule.

Of course, these spaces on the edge can also be thought of as the periphery and they are clearly not central spaces. To understand this idea, it is necessary to consider how, in academia, a sort of idealization of the center exists, where the places that turn out to be the most recognized or that are called the best are located, whether these places are in the best universities, the best faculties of a certain discipline, or the places where the women interviewed studied. Many of them had idealized those places. However, in these spaces they find hierarchical relationships, marked by a high level of competitiveness to reach that central place. Places that are remarkably closed to new perspectives. That attitudes and ways of behaving that underline that these are not spaces for difference. This leads them to "destroy" or renounce the ideal of the center and to opt for the, supposed, periphery. In the words of Dana A.:

What I have discovered is that the places of interdisciplinarity, and, the programs that have been misnamed, or projected, as peripheral and marginal, is that they are very interesting and very powerful! Let's say that what I have found in my workplace is one can speak from the margins and from the periphery, which gives us an enormous freedom for those of us who are there.

It is important to emphasize that from the construction of new academic spaces is possible from so-called peripheral and marginal spaces. This is because being on the edge, on the border, is to open the possibility for struggle, for resistance to traditional ways of doing academia. In fact, "placing women in the frontier means, among other things, placing them in the places of rebellion, of transgression, of resistance" (BLÁZQUEZ; FLÓRES; RÍOS, 2012, p. 129-130).

Another way of negotiating space is to opt for interdisciplinarity. Many of the interviewees point out the importance of dialogue and contact with other disciplines, as it is possible to enrich academic discussions in this way through other narratives, perspectives and knowledge. The same interdisciplinarity produces interactions mediated by respect, recognition and willingness to dialogue. Maria del Mar states:

And after a while the possibility arose to teach where I am now, which is in a doctorate program in Bioethics, where I have the opportunity to talk with people who are not only different in terms of discipline, but who have a logic of how to make academia radically different, given that Bioethics is a naturally multidisciplinary space and it's very new! The fundamental object is the construction of broad and plural perspectives.

It is possible to cut a new path and produce transformations in these new spaces. Margarita's life story, for example, is marked by this possibility. The philosopher considers that her work has been between teaching and other services. She has forged paths for the consolidation of both the

Faculty and the different places within the University where she works, places that, today, are quite consolidated but that in their time were new spaces. When one imagines the work of an academic today, one considers that the institutions already have consolidated spaces, places, and that one should comfortably produce in them. However, opening new paths is fundamental because it is a commitment both to future generations and to the past, as Margarita expressed it so well. It would appear difficult to open paths and give one's life to an institution presently. However, it would appear to be a of the ways of constituting spaces, of making them one's own. According to Margarita:

My task at the university has been to shape it; over time, over the years I look back, because I really believe that it is like, like the sense of being able to open up paths for others to walk on, for me, all the paths at the university I work at came from creating paths.

Rebeca describes something similar at the university where she works, with the creation of the publishing house She states:

After a while, when I started to propose the publishing house project, he was the one who supported me with it. Rafael, supported me with the project, he was interested, I made a very long conceptual document, and he found it interesting.

This way of forging a new path, of creating a space within a university, has contributed to Rebeca feeling good about her work, because there is confidence and credibility. In Margarita's case, there were also relationships of trust that allowed her to do many things within her workplace, which makes us think that, without these relationships, it is not so easy to create new spaces that transform academia.

Finally, another form of negotiation of academic space occurs when teaching. The classroom, in Catalina's words, "is one of the places that produces the most hope for me, it is a place of profoundly self-reflective professional practice and I believe it is one of the freest places there is". According to Laura, "in my current place of work there is a lot of freedom for teaching, the programs are super open, so teachers do what we like to do as well as what we know". As Carmen comments:

I see my classes as a place of freedom in which I can share with others, things that I know a little better because I am older, because I have more experience, because I have read certain things, so it's a space I can share with others, in which I am among equals, I try to think of them as equals.

Marina states:

I really think that there is something magical that happens in the classroom, really, that doesn't happen in any other space, that you just kind are there, you know, right now it's brutal! We're talking about the 17th century with eighteen-year-olds, and all of a sudden, we're looking at an image and there it feels like everybody is connected! And wondering about the same thin and it's like a space outside the world, I mean, I think it's cool that academia is not only a place to think about the world but also a place to suspend a little bit like the speeds of the world.

The interviewed women talk about their classes as a space of freedom and hope. While it is true that class spaces are largely institutionalized, when these spaces can be modified by their teachers in terms of content and modes of teaching, such spaces can be built. One might view these

statements with suspicion, because everything seems very free ‘when you are the one in charge,’ or when the teachers turn out to be sovereign over their own territory and repertoire, over the ways of evaluating and approaching knowledge, even over the fact that those in the actual class tend to be minors in both age and experience. This is a legitimate suspicion. However, their ways of considering the class spaces in themselves also show the ways in which it seems legitimate to maintain that classes are places of fracture.

The fact that these women are reflexive, makes it possible to see new things, in which teachers may have a certain freedom of action with respect to the organization of the class where the speeds of the world can be slowed down, and there are close relationships with the students. These all point to conditions that make it possible to modify the logics of academic spatiality. We do not deny that in the class there is a reproduction of logics of hierarchization and competitiveness, to mention a couple. It is not an idealized place, but the same hope shows the conditions for negotiating space there.

These spaces we have analyzed as spaces of negotiation in terms of resistance, transformation, renunciation and the configuration of spatiality itself. They also point to modes of relationship that seem to favor care. These are relationships that produce diverse communities and, within them, possibilities for cooperation, mutual respect, recognition and community building. According to Daniela O.:

What she [her thesis director] taught me is that when you are directing a thesis or when you are teaching a class, what you are building are really networks of care and without that care academia is wild and disgusting and destructive, but when you see networks of care and solidarity being built it really is something else.

These forms of relationship become modes of interaction that do not remain “*in the nakedness of purely instrumental relationships*” to use Margarita’s words. Consequently, one can take space and transform it. As Daniela O. states:

I still believe in the space of the university as a space that has allowed me to take it, to weave networks, to have discussions that I think are worth discussing, to write about topics that I think are worth writing about in spite of everything else, in spite of this neoliberal panorama, of the precariousness of labor.

While not simple, it is possible to constitute the space, to negotiate it, and to fight for it in order to build community. Thus, as Segato reminds us, it is possible to “domesticate politics,” that is to say, to “de-bureaucratize it, humanize it in a domestic key, of a repoliticized domesticity” (2016, p. 25). Note, we are not saying that we believe that it is easy to destroy the constituted space in a single strike.

THE PLACE OF FEMINISM

We highlight the role feminism has played in the life stories of the women interviewed, both to narrate how they inhabit academia and how they negotiate it. Feminism is a form of political sensitivity and thus “feminist sensitivity implies feeling close to the experience and circumstances of other people (women)” (GÓMEZ, 2010, p. 21). In the case of those interviewed, this sensitivity has been strengthened and matured through academic reflection.

Our interviewees consider themselves feminists. Although they draw on different traditions and have different conceptions of what it means to be a woman, they are deeply concerned about their place in social structures and in academia. Their encounter with feminism precedes an actual theorization of feminism. For Manuela “*as a woman, it is very difficult not to have found feminism in a personal sense before, it is only later that one theorizes it, but one already knows a lot, one’s very experience and body have lived a lot of frightening things*”.

Rebeca and Carmen point out how their “incipient” feminism was linked to their experience of home, more specifically it was connected to the relationship they had with their mothers. As Rebeca stated:

I think, maybe because of my mom, I think my mom doesn't know, right? but I think she's very feminist (slight laugh), right? because my mom always told us that, right? "You can work, you can work!"

The theorization of feminism in combination with their passage through academic space makes it possible to define their own experiences as women and share their experiences. According to Marina “feminism helped me, well, it is rather like *problematizing my own difficulties*”.

She shows the importance of problematizing her own life experiences in the light of the discussions about feminism, in order to shape what happens to women in the course of their daily lives as well as to resignify their own past. Saul is right in maintaining that those who read feminist philosophy (men or women) tend to produce a feminine bias (SAUL, 2016). In the words of Daniela O.:

Well, academia also, I feel that I owe it a lot, I didn't go crazy, because I was able to give shape to things I didn't know what they were, but I was a feminist, so it was like a moment of coming out of the closet there.

Both Daniela O. and Dana A. maintain that feminism is a certain ‘coming out’. Their life beforehand could be thought of as a prelude of hiding and fear, but ‘it could also be taken as an affirmation of their interest in emancipation. This idea of coming out or being in the closet points to the different prejudices that can be felt in contexts when the term ‘feminism’ is heard and when feminist women are met. Hence, in the words of Daniela O.:

Well, yes, let's say that working with feminism is paid for in different ways and that becoming a persona non grata also has considerable costs in terms of the and resources you can access, as well as promotions.

Catalina points out something similar, since “*the fact of being a little bit identified as the ‘feminist on duty’, well, it affects my relationships with everybody*”. Given the prejudice against feminism as well as against women who declare themselves feminists, relationships at the same university are altered at the same time as possibilities of transformation of spatiality, struggle, negotiation and resistance are opened up.

Following this possibility for transformation, it seems important to us to maintain that oppression is not inevitable, it is “but rather a product of the specific social relations that organize it” (RUBIN, 1986, p. 105). In this regard, it is possible to envision other modes of academia and not only imagine them or merely fantasize about them, but rather transform them from our very work. Thus, using the word ‘utopia’ is pertinent as it represents a modality of individual and collective imagination that considers the possibility of another place, another time and another way of being. It enables us to question reality and to express the possibilities of “a group that is repressed by the existing order” (RICOEUR, 2002. p. 357). As such, its positive role consists in proposing an alternative order.

This political power that our imagination suggests can be seen in the life stories of our women interviewees. Margarita maintains that “*I would like a model of life in which there is a lot of generosity, in which there are deeper relationships with others, where each individual can show development and excellence, but where there's much more – a world with a mutual care*”. For her part, Catalina points out:

I don't need to convert the entire judicial branch to feminism for there to be a real revolution, but what I do need is for justice workers in general to stop being afraid of the word ‘feminism’ and to have a gender perspective when making judicial decisions.

As we can see, there is in these exercises of the imagination, a conception of the possible, of the existence of another place, another way of being pose questions regarding heteropatriarchal logics, the coloniality of knowledge and capitalist productivity; this power would appear to be closely linked to a type of academia and academic work that exists through the care and the possibility of intervening spatially.

CONCLUSIONS

Our thesis considered that the dualistic, colonial, heteropatriarchal logics as they are lived in academia are opposed to the care of others and even of oneself. However, research shows that the notion of care has several meanings, therefore, it is controversial. We find that care is conceived as a way of caring for and protecting others, of relating to others respectfully, of allowing modes of interaction that make it possible for people to flourish and, in this regard, build a community where broad and plural perspectives prevail. We find that in academia, it also means responsible academic production, which takes time, and that its purpose is the transformation of reality. It is these forms and conceptions of care that we defend and consider appropriate.

Care also refers to and is associated with both the feminine and the domestic, and it is, therefore, seen as something pejorative from the point of view of the masculine ideal. Care is transformed into a gender stereotype that leads women in the work space to have an overload of work, while they are supposedly obliged to resolve the affairs of others because they are seen as mothers and counselors, as those who 'know' how to handle emotions. This overload leads us to think that we, ourselves, are not able to produce rational knowledge. As care is conceived as maternal and is considered calm, soft and sweet, many men's attitudes towards women consist of infantilizing them, treating them like girls, being more gentle or even being condescending. These practices are fallacies of care, where women are relegated as incompetent subjects to deal with academia. We oppose these fallacious forms of care and we thusly dispute the very notion of care.

For all of our interviewees, the spaces on the edge are the places where they find the possibility for intervention, for decision, and for adjusting their own practices of "taking up of space", "opening paths up", "forming networks". It would appear that the consideration of academia as the *Master's* space in the regard to how the feminine has been invisibilized and related to the private sphere. For all the interviewed women the possibility of building, of exercising freedom, of being heard and of being able to make decisions all represent the very freedom and the affection for the space they have constructed themselves.

The places where the interviewees feel comfortable and free, where they have been able to grow and make grow, and take care of themselves are spaces they consider wonderful. In this sense, inspired by Segato (2016), we believe in the importance of repoliticizing care, of making it a daily practice in the hegemonic academic space and not leaving it only in spaces on the edge or in microspaces. We want a careful, undisciplined, debureaucratized academia; an academia that takes care of the freedom to be, to decide, to build; a shared academia that takes care of the bodies that transit within it and build it, an academia that is not falsely caring.

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All three authors, collectively, participated in the conception, creation and consolidation of the article. We used our different formations (Philosophy and Cultural Studies) to established a dialogue between them and, with it, we constructed epistemological discussions and apply the methodological tools necessary for the consolidation of this research. We all work in the academy and look for ways to inhabit it in a different way.

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