Morgane Flahault
C. Clifford Flanigan Memorial Colloquium
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Esta Puente, mi Traducción. The politics of editorial choice of *Esta Puente, mi Espalda*

As I opened the original English edition of *Esta Puente, mi Espalda* ("This Bridge Called my Back"), I was surprised to find many differences between the English and its subsequent edition translated into Spanish, issued in 1988 by small publishing house Ism Press, based in San Francisco. Some of the essays in *Puente* were added to the English edition, while some of the original ones had been removed from the Spanish edition. Photographs and biographies of the authors now greeted the reader, along with various photographs and art pieces documenting the lives of women of color in the US. These differences prompted me to look more deeply into the editorial choices that had been made for the Spanish publication, which would reflect the editors' politics and show clues of the potential readership that was targeted by this edition. What were these choices, and how were they motivated? By comparing the two editions, I formulated hypotheses to give us an insight into the realm of third world women feminists and lesbians of the late 1970s and 1980s.

This Bridge Called my Back and *Esta Puente, mi Espalda* are collective works lead by many women. Puerto Rican, Native American, Chicana, Jewish, Korean-American, African American, lesbian, mother, daughter, lover, immigrant, college educated, working-class and uneducated, immigrant, middle-class, indigenous, etc. are the various identities which join forces and collide in this one of a kind anthology. While *Bridge* was written and compiled out of a necessity to address a common issue that can be summed up in a few words – the systematic rejection and conspicuous absence of women of color in the US feminist movement – the variety of authors included in the anthology provide a narrative that is nonconsensual and dialogic rather

than homogeneous. For its Spanish edition, the editors might have sought to provide a more "stable" narrative through variations in translation, adding and subtracting essays, while revising their order and framing them with biographical information. To produce an edition that would be legible for a Spanish speaking and reading audience, explicitly addressed to a Latin American public, the editors and translators chose to present them with a more didactic version of *Bridge*. The potential readership of *Puente* is thus also, in its own respect, a very diverse group.

Rolando Hijonosa, in his Foreword to *Criticism in the Borderlands* addresses the issue of *Bridge*'s theory as part of a new discourse that could feel insecure about its own legitimacy. From its inception, the kind of model and criticism that the book offered was to meet a number of obstacles, not the least in terms of its publication. Moraga wrote in the foreword to the second edition of *Bridge* in 1983: "In the last three years I have learned that Third World feminism does not provide the kind of easy political framework that women of color are running to in droves. (…) The *idea* of Third World feminism has proved to be much easier between the covers of a book than between real live women" (iii). We might then ask: how does third world feminism from the US perspective impact a Latin American landscape? The fact that the Spanish edition was published by a US publishing house might seem surprising and attests to the obstacles in creating alliances across borders. Was Anglo-American feminism a point of reference and of rupture in South America at the time of the publication? Was there a similar or parallel disjunction between a feminist, white ruling class and women of color's experience in countries like Argentina and Mexico, for instance?

These problems will be the focus of my talk today. In the longer version of this paper, I tackled the issue of the language of translation itself and highlighted the contradictions between the linguistic variations present in the original work (oralized and colloquial English, Spanglish,

Spanish, Black Vernacular, Nahuatl, etc.) that present a form of resistance to English as a hegemonic language and the Spanish version, a forced linguistic homogenization. I also paid attention to significant differences in the paratext (addition and deletion of essays/authors, preface, chapter divisions, glossary, etc.) between the English and the Spanish editions that must have reflected the editors' particular sympathies and political allegiances. As an example, Norma Alarcón does not seem to favor lesbian voices within her theoretical praxis, whereas it is one of the essential features of the anthology. Another striking difference is the absence of Jewish poets Judit Moschkovich and Rosario Levins Morales in *Puente*, a removal that might have been justified by Cherríe Moraga's anti-semitism.

For now, I will focus on analyzing the relationship between US Third World feminism and the politics of publication for a Latin American readership.

As Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa were conceptualizing an anthology of writings that would serve as a bridge between women of color to express their existence and importance in feminist and social movements, they must have had in mind their Latin American sisters, as Chicana authors whose experience rested crucially on a transnational awareness. For the voices of women of color to matter beyond national borders and in order to build a meaningful movement, a book in English and published in the US displayed limited conditions: how would third world feminism from the US perspective impact a Latin American landscape? The first edition of *Bridge* was handed over to Persephone Press. A small house founded in 1976 in Watertown, Massachusetts, by women of Jewish origins, (Pat McGloin, Deborah Snow, and Gloria Z. Greenfield) it carried a number of poetic works and essays with a focus on feminism and lesbianism, but not particularly women/lesbians of color, though it published some works by authors Michelle Cliff, Audre Lorde, and Barbara Smith. Smith was to found Kitchen Table a

few years later (the full title for the publishing house is Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press). Some of the works published were by Jewish women – an identity that, as we will see later, would prove contentious as to its pertinence as belonging in the women of color group.

After the short-lived Persephone Press experience, Kitchen Table released the second edition of *Bridge* in 1983. Moraga, Anzaldúa and hattie gossett (whose poem "billie loves! billie lives" appears in *Bridge*, but not in *Puente*) were at first involved in the functioning of Kitchen Table. A note appears before the first foreword of the second edition written by Moraga. It reads:

> When Persephone Press, Inc., a white women's [sic] press of Watertown, Massachusetts and the original publishers of Bridge, ceased operation in the Spring of 1983, this book had already gone out of print. After many months of negotiations, the co-editors were finally able to retrieve control of their book, whereupon Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press of New York agreed to republish it. The following, then, is the second edition of This Bridge Called My Back, conceived of and produced entirely by women of color.

This note sets the tone for the reader to get a glimpse of the politics of publication at work. From the very beginning of the book, we are made privy of the battle that raged in the feminist world between white women and women of color, and how the control of means of publication was of utmost importance. There was a necessity to provide it with a more specialized publishing medium that focused on Third World women, a term that most of the authors from the anthology emphasize here. The socialist reading of the class issue is more systematically brought up, and the book seeks to constantly recall the reader how sex, class, race and sexuality are part of a closely intertwined oppressive system. The choice of these successive publishing houses reflects the very division that the authors/editors purport to expose with these

writings. Whose interest, whose allegiance? Should they choose their side in order to be published? *Bridge* clearly points out that feminist and/or lesbian circles were notoriously excluding women of color's problems and interests. By publishing through Persephone Press, this criticism was targeting a major part of the readership by calling them out on this particular problem, which might have caused tensions[1]. As an example, an anonymous reviewer of *Bridge* at the time of the first publication wrote: "This Bridge Called My Back, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, Persephone Press. An excellent anthology by women of colour. A strong message that will not leave white women totally comfortable about assumptions but more conscious of the need for building bridges. Betsy Nuse of Broadsides urged readers to seek out this book despite the possible discomfort they might experience" (Grassroots, Lesbian and Gay Saskatchewan Winter 81-82). Although it is difficult to evaluate to what extent Persephone Press' readership stayed away from or was displeased with *Bridge*'s message, there was a clear need to create a publication means which would be controlled by women of color, and extend the boundaries of feminism in print. This would also require an opening across borders, reaching out to women in South America, with the project of a Spanish translation of *This Bridge Called My Back*.

The first edition of *Bridge* would serve as an origin from which *Puente* would be translated. The forewords to the second edition, written respectively by Moraga and Anzaldúa in 1983, have not found their way into the 1988 Spanish edition. Moraga's foreword reflects on the

[1] Audre Lorde's famous essay, for instance, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", is a very straightforward denunciation: "It is a particular academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory in this time and in this place without examining our many differences, and without significant input from poor women, black and third-world women, and lesbians (…) What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable" (*Bridge* 98)

time that has passed between the two editions, and the differences that would appear, had it been conceived at the time she writes:

> [I]t would speak much more directly now to the relations between women and men of color, both gay and heterosexual. In 1979, response to a number of earlier writings by women of color which in the name of feminism focused almost exclusively on relations between the sexes, Bridge intended to make a clean break from that phenomenon. Instead, we created a book which concentrated on relationships *between women*. (i)

Moreover, Moraga lays the path for a potential "bridge" with Latin America, as the Spanish edition a few years later would provide: "The second major difference a 1983 version of *Bridge* would provide is that it would be much more international in perspective (…) the impetus to forge links with women of color from every region grows more and more urgent as the number of recently-immigrated people of color in the U.S. grows in enormous proportions" (ii). She enumerates a number of political crises in the world that require that we turn our attention to, in particular here, Latin American countries where women of color are subjects of violence and potential (displaced population) immigrants. Was it that the idea of a book readable by Spanish-speaking women was germinating in Moraga's mind? In *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness*, published in 2011, Moraga looks back at the time of publication of *Bridge*. She realized, shortly after its first publication, that the debates about racism and feminism were revolving around a black and white divide and left out the question of all other minorities in the U.S., including gender and sexual minorities, but also in great part her own ethnicity: "In spite of my theoretical faith in the cross-cultural feminism of color proposed by *This Bridge Called My*

Back, four years after its publication I found that my feminism was taking on a decidedly Chicana formation in practice" ("A XicanaDyke Codex of Changing Consciousness/2000").

Reaching out to Third World women outside of the US appeared to Cherríe Moraga as an opportunity to build bridges transnationally, and call out for a broader sisterly alliance. Daniel Fogel was approached by Moraga in 1986 in San Francisco with the intention of publishing a Spanish edition of *Bridge* through Fogel's Ism Press. He had launched it in 1982 in order to publish a book he had just written about African freedom movements, *Africa in Struggle*. "Although that book never found any commercial success, I was surprised to find other politically radical writers inquiring if Ism would be interested in publishing their manuscripts!" (Fogel, email). Fogel had published a bilingual version of a collection of poems by a Chilean immigrant teacher named Hilda Ferrada, some of which Ana Castillo had translated. Castillo and Moraga had met Fogel at Ferrada's house, and after discussing the idea of a Spanish edition of *Bridge*, he agreed to take over the publication. The target audience was at the time not very precisely defined, but Moraga seemed to have Mexico and Central America in mind[2]. In any case, Ism press advertises the book on their website as for "las mujeres feministas de Latinoamérica". The note from the translators targets a broad readership in Spanish-speaking Latin America: "hemos tomado en cuenta la diversidad cultural del público hispanoamericano" (18i). Moraga in her *introducción* makes it clear that this edition will provide the perspective of women of color in the US for a Latin American feminist audience, as opposed to the usual white, Anglo feminism: "Los materiales feministas traducidos al español usualmente reflejan al punto de vista de la gringa o europea que ofrece muy poco análisis útil a la mayoría de la población de

[2] Moraga's essay, "La güera", had been published by the Mexican feminist magazine, *fem*. While she was discussing new essays to include in *Puente*, she mentioned to Daniel Fogel that she wanted to include more material by and about indigenous women, "which she felt would be more valuable to a Mexican readership" (Fogel, email)

mujeres en Latinoamérica […] Ofrecemos, entonces, este libro a nuestras hermanas latinoamericanas" (6) The problem with this kind of intent is (as seen in the note from the translators) that it risks putting all the "Latin American" readers in the same box, as if there was in effect such an entity as "Latin American women". The homogeneity of this supposed group has been largely criticized. For instance, Julio Ortega writes: "No podemos pretender a una identidad generalizada y niveladora, ni mucho menos conciliadora. Sólo podemos pensar en una identidad consciente de su peculiaridad y su pluralidad, enraizada en la historia común y en el proyecto colectivo" ("Crítica de la identidad. La Pregunta por el Perú en su literatura", 216, cited in Chanady Amaryll, xii). Moreover, this grouping risks conflating all Latin American women together and categorizing them under the label "Third World Women", with Anglo-North America seen as the common oppressor to be fought. This vision ignores the equivalent problem in Latin America where a (white) ruling class dominated the feminist discourse, and where women of color were excluded from the movement and therefore the subject of oppression from multiple levels. Daniel Fogel recalls Moraga's concerns with the state of the feminist community, especially in Mexico, where she, Alarcón and Fogel had attempted to make connections for the publication of *Puente*. Fogel recalls: "In my 9/8/87 conversation with Cherríe, she expressed a critical attitude toward Mexico's *fem* magazine and its editor, Elena Urrutia: "*fem* is very middle-class. They're not that open about lesbianism. Elena Urrutia is from the wealthy class…"" She also commented on the state of the lesbian movement in Mexico, which perhaps would be an obstacle to the circulation of *Puente*'s ideas: ""They're into separatism and not as sensitive to women of color." Lesbian activists in Mexico tend to be middle-class and perhaps snobbish, she added" (Fogel, email). Finding the language and the

form that would be appealing to a "Latin American" readership would thus prove to be a delicate task.

Sandra Bermann contends that translation emphasizes the foreignness and difference between nations, cultures, etc.; it brings out the "cultural" and "epistemological otherness" of the initial and target languages' concerned (4). Beyond the adaptation of the texts and the ideals defended by the authors that compose *This Bridge Called My Back*, we witness the struggles inherent to the creation of a community of feminist women of color, with all of the personal and political contradictions at the heart of this community, that shape and re-imagine the movement's multifarious manifesto. As the book originally insisted on building a sense of community and similarity of experience between all these women, we can sense nonetheless that the Spanish edition provided not only a bridge to a Spanish speaking readership, but also a platform for experimentation with the limits and perspectives that the women of color's movement would produce at the time. Despite or perhaps because of its fumbling beginnings, this trailblazing anthology would inspire many other publications and presses to represent feminist and lesbian women of color in its wake.