

Seminar series of the Center for Research and Practice in Cultural Continuity

“Decolonizing approaches to studying history and linguistic-cultural heritage. Methods, tools, results and challenges”



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Paradoxes of Power and Purity: Violence Without Victims, Aztecs Without Indigeneity, And Ongoing Coloniality in Mexico

Conducting anthropological research in racialized communities means being already enmeshed in identity politics. In this presentation, I will unpack two paradoxes of identity that I encountered during my long-term ethnographic research on gender violence in Milpa Alta, a rural, partially Nahuatl-speaking community on the southern mountainous margins of Mexico City. The first paradox regards ethnicity: Milpaltenses were often proud of their Aztec ancestors but many simultaneously denied being “Indigenous”. Similarly puzzling, many women reported having experienced intimate violence and yet insisted that they were not “victims”. Drawing on María Lugones (2008), I will argue that these two paradoxes are interrelated. Conditions of ongoing coloniality place women in multiple double binds. Following Elizabeth Povinelli (2002), liberal multiculturalism forces Indigenous people to perform authenticity in order to claim rights that have been historically withheld from them because of their racialization as Indigenous people. Similarly, violence survivors are required to identify as victims in order to receive government support but risk being exposed to further violence in the process. By refusing Indigeneity and victimhood, Milpaltense women reject colonialist logics of purity. They instead assert and redefine the meaning of feminine power and Indigenous authenticity. Yet certain ambivalences remain. In discussing these complexities, I will also reflect on anthropological methods and ethics.

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ZOOM LINK: <https://zoom.us/j/98037235262>



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