Voices of the Americas for Academic Freedom

Episode 1 - Gender and Academic Freedom

Overview

The inaugural episode of Voices of the Americas for Academic Freedom, the CLAA podcast, positions this right as an indispensable condition for democracy and human rights, highlighting that its exercise is deeply intersected by structural inequalities of **gender and race**. Through an intersectional lens, it becomes clear that the production, circulation, and validation of knowledge are not neutral processes, but are conditioned by power relations that limit who can research, teach, and fully participate in academic life.

In conversation with experts and scholars from the region, it is emphasized that gender-based violence, racism, scientific denialism, and institutional restrictions directly affect academic freedom, both individually and collectively. These dynamics not only expel or silence voices but also impoverish the available knowledge, reproducing historical biases that exclude women, people of African descent, and other historically marginalized groups.

The episode calls for transforming academic structures and public policies, promoting epistemic justice, plurality of knowledge, and real conditions for the full exercise of academic freedom. It reaffirms the need to strengthen networks, make resistance visible, and ensure that all voices can produce knowledge without fear, as a foundation for building more just and egalitarian societies in the Americas.

Guests:

Raising Voices Section: In-depth Interview

Patsilí Toledo Vásquez, Ph.D. in public law with specialized training in women's human rights.

She addresses the following topics:

- **Gender-based violence and academic freedom.**
- **Gender denialism.**
- **Denialism in the social sciences.**
- **Biases and data disaggregation.**
- **Academic freedom through a gender lens.**
- **Questioning the prism of privilege in knowledge production.**
- **Recommendations for strengthening academic freedom.**

"Knowledge in Dialogue" Section: Fellowship Experience Exchange

Anny Ocoró Loango, sociologist and PhD in social sciences focused on the intersectional analysis of gender and race in Latin American higher education.

Ana Lucía Ramazzini Morales, feminist sociologist and research professor, articulates feminist theory, decolonial critique, and analysis of academic freedom in Central America.

Reflections shared from Fellowship experiences:

- **Gender and race in knowledge production: epistemic plurality.**
- **Epistemic hierarchies, authority, power, and structural exclusion.**
- **Recommendations for epistemic diversity and cognitive justice**

FULL EPISODE

Camilla Croso, director of the CLAA:

Voices of the Americas for Academic Freedom is a podcast by the Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas.

A space that brings together activists and researchers from across the region to reflect on the challenges, tensions, and advances in the defense of academic freedom and university autonomy.

Drawing on diverse perspectives and experiences, we seek to strengthen continental dialogue and promote the circulation of knowledge that contributes to protecting and advancing this fundamental human right.

In each episode, we explore topics such as democracy, gender and race, structural inequalities, epistemic justice, and scientific denialism, as well as the many other challenges facing this right in our societies today, analyzing their relationship to academic freedom.

Because when knowledge can circulate freely, with scientific rigor, and in dialogue with human rights, the conditions are created for democracy and justice to strengthen and flourish.

I am Camilla Croso, director of the Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas, and I will be your host for this program.

Academic freedom is a fundamental condition for democracy. It is the right to think without fear, to research with scientific rigor, to teach and learn freely, and to share knowledge to understand and transform our societies. However, in the Americas, we still face enormous challenges in ensuring the full realization of this right.

In this inaugural episode, we propose reflecting on academic freedom from an intersectional perspective, incorporating the dimensions of gender and race. Far from being an abstract or neutral principle, the ability to research, teach, and produce knowledge is permeated by structural inequalities that determine who can fully exercise this right.

We welcome you to the “Raising Voices” section of our Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas podcast, which features an in-depth interview addressing academic freedom.

We are delighted to have Patsili Toledo Vázquez with us.

Thank you, Patsili, for joining us for this inaugural episode of the CLAA podcast.

“Alzar Voces” Segment

Patsili Toledo Vázquez, Ph.D. in Public Law, Guest:

Thank you very much for inviting me

Camilla Croso:

Let me introduce you before we begin our conversation.

Patsili Toledo Vázquez holds a Ph.D. in Public Law from the Autonomous University of Barcelona and a law degree from the University of Chile, with specialized training in women’s human rights. An academic, researcher, and international consultant, she has over 25 years of experience working on issues of gender-based violence, criminal justice systems, and femicide. She currently serves on the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a United Nations body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Patsili has served as a consultant for various agencies within the United Nations system, including UNODC, UN Women, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. She was the drafter of Recommendation No. 35 of the CEDAW Committee in 2017, which updates international standards on gender-based violence against women.

So, Patsili, thank you very much for being here. You are a key figure in our struggle against gender-based violence, for gender equality in the broadest sense, and for systems that truly overcome patriarchy. We are delighted to speak with you now, drawing on all your experience, to help us reflect further on the connection between your entire career and the perspective of advancing the fundamental human right to academic freedom—a right that is increasingly recognized as a fundamental human right linked to the right to education, yet a right in its own right. Patsili, we are pleased to note that it is increasingly being recognized as a fundamental human right—not merely linked to the right to education, but a right in its own right.

Our first question for you: we invite you to reflect on the link between gender and academic freedom. What we have observed in recent years is that we have made some progress in recognizing gender-based violence within universities as a central issue, but it remains largely invisible. We have made progress, but we are still far from a satisfactory outcome. It is still an invisible issue and, therefore, one that is rarely addressed.

From your perspective, how does gender-based violence in educational systems and spaces affect women's exercise of academic freedom, and what steps could be taken to address this reality?

Gender-Based Violence and Academic Freedom

Patsili Toledo Vázquez:

I want to reiterate my gratitude for this conversation with you, Camilla, which is also so timely right now.

The question is very thought-provoking because I believe that visibility alone is insufficient when we seek to address a problem. Visibility is only the first step—recognizing and naming that a problem exists—and then we face many others before we can effectively confront and respond to it.

It is also important to recognize that, just as has happened with violence against women in other areas, a long time has passed since we began, for example, to name domestic violence, and even today the responses we have may not satisfy us. It is okay that they do not satisfy us and that we are always looking for ways to improve them.

Similarly, in the university setting, it is true that a major step is at least making it visible, and I believe that, without a doubt, we will continue to make it visible for many years to come. There has been a great deal of resistance to this visibility and to public complaints, and in many countries it is proving difficult to implement protocols, for example, to respond appropriately to complaints. We are up against administrative frameworks, the protection of academic professionals' jobs, and the power dynamics that are so inherent to deeply hierarchical institutions like academic ones.

We still have a long way to go; these voices remain extremely important, and I believe that the progress we're seeing here in Barcelona (Spain), where I live, often comes decades after the initial complaints were filed.

There are cases that are finally receiving strong institutional responses, but this is likely happening nearly 20 years after the first complaints were filed. This shows that we still have a long way to go, and that the voices speaking out are essential, because much of what happens in universities is not isolated cases.

These are not individual cases, and that takes time—it takes time for voices to come together and form a chorus, a collective reality that also becomes public. I believe we are on the right path.

Camilla Croso:

Thank you also for highlighting this aspect that these are not isolated cases. In fact, we have spoken with many women who feel very alone; the issue of loneliness and being treated as isolated cases has been a massive problem, and they have gained some support by making it visibly collective and naming it as such.

In various countries, we are seeing the rise of denialist discourses that question or seek to delegitimize categories such as gender within scientific knowledge.

You have pointed out that gender denialism seeks to undermine feminist policies. How does this type of denialism impact academic freedom?

That is, on the ability to research, teach, and produce knowledge about patriarchy, gender inequalities, and the policies needed to address them. And from your experience, have you observed specific forms of censorship or restrictions targeting academics or institutions linked to this phenomenon?

Gender denialism

Patsili Toledo Vázquez

Thank you very much for this question, which is so relevant and, sadly, so timely today. A few weeks ago, I was also reading about how, precisely in the United States, there are gender studies groups or centers that are beginning to close, that are running out of funds to operate, and unfortunately, ideological censorship sometimes does not necessarily appear as an ideological issue, but rather as a financial one. It appears simply as a lack of funds to sustain this type of research.

And I believe that is where it is so important to have strategies—strategies that must be coordinated to make them strong—to support research that is not confined to a university as an isolated world, but is international, carried out through university networks where work and research can be supported, because we know that these kinds of phenomena sometimes occur in some countries in a more severe manner than in others, depending on political factors, including, at times, the persecution that has affected certain individuals in the academic sphere in some countries.

Internationalization is one of the fundamental tools for keeping gender studies and gender research alive; I teach a course on gender and criminal justice. For example, I believe it is very important that this subject exists in criminology programs, as well as in law programs, and it is also important that all fields of study—whether constitutional law or labor law—include studies and critical analysis from a gender perspective within their curricula.

It is important to have our specialized centers of study, but our larger goal—and when I say “our,” I am thinking from the perspective of feminist studies—is for all fields of study to have a gender perspective, so that in civil law we do not have to rely solely on specialized courses, as electives, to delve deeper into these issues, but rather ensure that all other research always incorporates this perspective.

Camilla Croso:

How important is it that gender studies be understood as part of the social sciences—is it part of the sciences?

When we talk about scientific denialism, those attacks on gender studies are part of this denialism. Generally, when we talk about denialism, we tend to think more of other sciences—the hard sciences, or climate science, or medicine and health—but it is also denialism when one questions…

Denialism in the social sciences

Patsili Toledo Vázquez:

Absolutely. In a way, the invisibilization of differences has historically been part of historical denialism—it is a form of concealment. How many studies have been conducted without including women in their samples or without reporting on the gender of those participating in certain studies?

We need to keep saying that, in reality, research has been biased. Research that has failed to consider and has ignored the gender factors that impact realities, medicine, and studies in the so-called "harder sciences"—when they do not take into account what is actually happening, how medicines and treatments specifically affect men and women in different ways.

Camilla Croso:

Thinking more about this issue of how research is conducted, we wanted to ask you the following: discrimination and biases are often sustained by the available information, which prevents other lines of research that reveal prejudice or structural ignorance. For this reason, the importance of disaggregated data—including categories such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability—is highlighted in analyses of femicide and structural discrimination from this intersectional perspective.

What challenges and resistance have you observed in incorporating disaggregated analyses into criminal justice institutions? And what would be a path for educational and research systems to address these challenges?

Biases and Data Disaggregation

Patsili Toledo Vázquez:

Put simply, it is the challenge of complexity. And I don't mean to say that the challenge of complexity and complex thinking is exclusive to the field of law or exclusive to the field of criminal justice; I believe that in many fields we find ourselves including too many variables in the analysis, and it seems that it is no longer possible to sustain it.

On the other hand, there may also be a sort of perception that these variables compete with one another. That is the challenge. I believe there is no way to incorporate a gender approach truly grounded in human rights unless it is intersectional, and we cannot isolate it; the only way to understand gender is intersectionally, and this involves considering racial discrimination, ableism, discrimination based on health status, immigration status, and so on—these are all part of the discussions and reflections.

What happens? The analysis is more complex. Yes. But we cannot trade a simplified and partial message or analysis for a complex analysis that will truly account for reality and effectively enable, in the case of social studies, the development of public policies that are more appropriate and respond to a reality that is not simply binary in terms of what happens to men or women or in which all women are the same.

The issue of violence is one of the clearest examples—feminicides, for instance, involving women of African descent and how they are overrepresented among the victims, as well as indigenous women in many of our Latin American countries. They require and demand specific analyses; we cannot apply a one-size-fits-all approach. The same logic applies when we speak of the human being or man as this singular, complete entity, when we know and acknowledge that situations are not the same.

Camilla Croso:

I wanted to shift our conversation a bit, to consider recognizing academic freedom not only as an individual right, but as a collective right—that is how we understand it at the CLAA.

The right to academic freedom does not belong only to teachers and researchers, as many people generally seem to understand it, but is a collective right that also belongs to students, to the educational community as a whole, and even beyond. It is a collective right because it also belongs to society. In the sense that it shapes the production of knowledge, and that knowledge is a public good. *Thinking from a gender lens, how does gender-based violence in educational spaces and the censorship we were discussing regarding gender studies impact that collective dimension of academic freedom?*

Academic Freedom Through a Gender Lens

Patsili Toledo Vázquez:

It has a huge impact. I'm thinking not only of violence, but of multiple forms of gender-based discrimination in the academic sphere that lead, for example, to female researchers or faculty members leaving academic life or being indirectly pushed out of it due to precarious working conditions that fail to recognize, for instance, the impact of care work on women or the impact of motherhood, and who have to enter the labor market to compete, so to speak, with other professionals under seemingly equal conditions, when in reality the starting conditions are not.

In academia, there is a tendency to be much more competitive under a "publish or perish" logic, which demands the production of academic knowledge—such as academic publications—at a certain pace. There are pivotal moments in women's lives when, for example, many of them may be in a reproductive phase that impacts their careers in ways entirely different from how reproduction impacts men's careers.

This, combined with dynamics of violence—and when we speak of violence, we shouldn't limit ourselves to thinking only of sexual violence—there are also dynamics of bullying within universities.

Institutional or academic bullying exists and affects those at the most precarious levels of research—research assistants, doctoral and postdoctoral students—who are overburdened with work. Due to the vertical structure of the system, women are often expected to fulfill certain roles that are heavily gendered, such as playing a subordinate role and assisting in the research of others.

There are many factors at play—not only the violence that drives victims out, as happens in many other settings, but also other dynamics within the universities themselves.

Camilla Croso:

So many women end up unable to pursue their academic careers. And the knowledge that is produced and disseminated also lacks a women's perspective; in other words, what reaches the public domain is already biased.

Like when we consider the whole issue of navigating the multiple hierarchies we have out there—ultimately, what knowledge reaches the public domain. We have to challenge this to ensure women's perspectives are present in that public domain…

Questioning the Prism of Privilege in Knowledge Production

Patsili Toledo Vázquez:

Absolutely. Yes, that is, to what extent is much of the academic knowledge in human history, in reality, academic knowledge from the perspectives of mainly men, mainly from privileged contexts. That is the lens through which we have received seemingly objective scientific information. So, of course, there is a great deal of work to be done.

Camilla Croso:

We have one final question for you: based on your experience working with international standards, *what responsibility do universities and states have to prevent gender-based violence in the academic sphere and ensure that universities are safe spaces where academic freedom can be fully exercised? And what recommendations would you offer to promote the cultural and structural changes needed to confront patriarchy in educational systems?*

Recommendations to Strengthen Academic Freedom

Patsili Toledo Vázquez:

That's a very ambitious question. States bear full responsibility for ensuring human rights, and these rights apply within universities as well; universities are not spaces outside the state, and therefore the obligation to guarantee human rights extends to university classrooms.

The first step is to acknowledge the situation; most of our universities should regularly conduct at least surveys to identify issues beyond formal complaints. Because the few cases of violence or abuse of power that are reported are typically very extreme, and in

these cases, the people filing complaints are risking the continuation of their academic careers from the very beginning.

Aiming to increase the number of reports may be a goal, but we must acknowledge that the reality is far more complex. Just as in other spaces where deep power dynamics exist—such as within families—believing that reporting is the solution, the only solution, or the sole path to change is insufficient. Changes must be implemented by analyzing the surveys, which reveal the reality that is not being reported and what measures are being taken.

Recognizing the problem will be the gateway for many more people to identify all the issues. So yes, establishing dialogues and conversations in universities, discussions about what students, researchers, and professionals are experiencing in all fields—not just in the social sciences, but in other fields as well.

Not only what punitive measures we are going to adopt in universities, but also what measures we are going to adopt in universities to repair the harm that has been caused—and that is where we have to think about what creative responses we want to implement, not only so that women experiencing violence or discrimination can continue in their academic careers, but also how we are going to truly ensure that the harm they have suffered is repaired by the institution itself.

Camilla Croso:

Patsili, thank you so much for this conversation with us on this CLAA podcast. We hope to contribute and collaborate with you in the future and in other contexts.

Patsili Toledo Vázquez:

Thank you very much to all of you, and thank you very much for all the work you are doing. It has been an honor to participate in this conversation.

“Knowledge in Dialogue” Section

Camilla Croso, director of the CLAA:

Let’s move on to our “Knowledge in Dialogue” section of our Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas podcast, which shares reflections drawn from the experience of the Fellowships, a joint initiative with the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) aimed at strengthening comparative research and critical thinking within the framework of academic freedom in the Americas.

In this section, we will speak with two Latin American researchers whose careers converge around a common theme: the defense of critical knowledge production in the face of structures of gender and racial inequality.

Joining us is Anny Ocoró Loango, a sociologist and PhD in social sciences from the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) Argentina, whose academic work focuses on the intersectional analysis of gender and race in Latin American higher education,

particularly regarding the trajectories of women of African descent and affirmative action policies aimed at educational justice.

Also joining us is Ana Lucía Ramazzini Morales, a feminist sociologist and research professor affiliated with FLACSO Guatemala, whose academic work integrates feminist theory, colonial critique, and analysis of academic freedom in Central America.

Through situated and rigorous approaches, both have analyzed how racial hierarchies, gender inequalities, and traditional criteria of scientific legitimacy determine who can conduct research, what knowledge is recognized as valid, and under what conditions it circulates in the public sphere.

In dialogue with initiatives promoted by the CLAA, their work invites us to consider academic freedom not only as a legal principle but as a concrete practice that demands epistemic justice, plurality, and real guarantees for those who produce knowledge from historically subalternized positions.

Critical Thinkers and the Crises of Academic Freedom in Chiapas and Central America is the title of the research project in which Ana Lucía Ramazzini Morales participates. From a feminist, colonial, and intersectional perspective, the initiative analyzes the barriers, restrictions, and forms of violence faced by critical thinkers, feminist women, and LGBTIQ+ individuals in Chiapas, Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, particularly in crisis contexts during the 20th and 21st centuries.

For her part, Anny Ocoró Loango is leading the research project “Afrodiasporic Academic Freedom, Associations of Afro-descendant Researchers, and Their Role in the Struggle Against Sexism and Racism in the Academic Field,” which seeks to analyze the role of associations and Afro-descendant researchers in the struggle against sexism, racism, and class inequalities in academia, as well as the strategies they have developed to confront institutional epistemic racism and strengthen the agency of researchers of African descent and the defense of academic freedom.

Together, their research invites us to reflect on how the struggles for gender and racial equality are also fundamental struggles for the freedom to research, teach, and produce knowledge.

So, a very warm welcome to you, Anny and Ana, to our CLAA podcast. It is a tremendous pleasure to have you here; it is truly an honor. I am very happy that you are launching our podcast, and I am happy that in this first episode we are discussing the issues of gender and race and their connection to academic freedom.

We have three questions for you. I’ll start with the first one, my dears.

There are evident tensions between institutional frameworks for validating knowledge and the situated experiences of women and people of African descent in academic and organizational settings. Your studies show how racialization and gender intersect with the production of knowledge, as well as with processes of recognition and legitimacy.

Based on the main findings of your research, *how do you describe the ways in which gender and race impact the production, validation, and circulation of knowledge? And what implications do you identify for academic freedom, understood not only as a formal right but as a real possibility to articulate situated knowledge?*

Let's start with Anny.

Gender and Race in the Production of Knowledge: Epistemic Plurality

Anny Ocoró Loango, sociologist and PhD in social sciences, guest:

Well, thank you very much, Camilla, and it's a pleasure to be here on this podcast, sharing it with Ana Lucía. It's wonderful that these kinds of spaces exist, especially at a time when academic freedom is so threatened by fundamentalist conservative sectors that want to deny rights and encroach on freedoms. So, well, it's a huge pleasure.

Regarding the question, as a Black or Afro-descendant researcher—there are different terms for this—we view with great concern what is happening in the academic field and see that the legitimacy of knowledge is not a neutral process. Just as multiple gender, racial, and economic inequalities exist in our societies, they affect the legitimacy of knowledge. These power relations that exist in the social world are reproduced in the field of knowledge, and there we see how that legitimacy and validity are affected, for example, in the case of Afro-descendant populations, where there are ongoing practices that legitimize these communities as producers of knowledge, yet do not even acknowledge that they are producers of knowledge or wisdom; and, in general, there are disputes related to the epistemic, structural racism that exists in our societies.

We have been challenging this through various initiatives within scientific associations and among Afro researchers, proposing alternative spaces for the production and circulation of knowledge, because we believe it is important to denounce the racist and sexist biases that exist. To accompany and coordinate this entire network of researchers through intellectual and political support, across various spaces—not only those that bring researchers together, but also those that produce knowledge that challenges and debates the racial hierarchies and sexism present in our societies, which, I reiterate, is not foreign to the academic field.

As you rightly said, who can speak? Who is legitimized to speak? How is the knowledge of our societies validated through, for example, those usual channels or publication circles that are often concentrated in certain groups?

We challenge that—the need for epistemic plurality, for a plurality of spaces that allow voices historically silenced to be heard. These societies have significant contributions from African cultures and their descendants that need to be made visible in this epistemic field.

Camilla Croso:

Fantastic, Ana. Thank you very much for your reflection, and Ana Lucía, *how do you see this from your perspective and based on your studies? How have you encountered this epistemic dispute in your research?* Ana Lucía.

Ana Lucía Ramazzini Morales, feminist sociologist and research professor, guest:

Thank you, Camilla. I join in thanking this forum; it is a privilege to be here and share these reflections with Anny. So thank you very much.

I agree with what Anny and you have raised, because in the research we conducted together with Marisa Ruiz Trejo (UNACH, Mexico) from Chiapas and Tania Mata Parducci (Center for the Arts for Peace, Museum of Memory) from El Salvador, precisely one of the key premises you mention is that when we speak of knowledge and the construction of knowledge, it cannot be understood as a neutral process, much less a universal one. It is a situated practice of patriarchal, racist, colonial, and heteronormative power relations, which, in this process of construction, determine who the authorized epistemic subjects are. That is, who they are, who has the legitimacy to construct knowledge, and also the authority to articulate it.

In that sense, through the research we conduct, we analyze how this violation of academic freedom manifests itself through the discrediting—especially of women, of female thinkers—but also of those bodies that do not conform to that epistemic subject, that is, bodies that do not conform to masculinized, racialized bodies, in this case defined by whiteness, urbanity, and the dominant class. In other words, how have these regimes of truth been constructed with so many biases that serve only to marginalize the plurality of knowledge?

What did we find in our research that reveals this reproduction of violence against academic freedom?

We found testimonies from critical thinkers who have been harassed for research topics that are also related to their own lived experiences; they have been harassed for bringing research to academic and discussion forums related to, for example, accompanying missing persons or issues linked to the LGBTIQ+ population. Furthermore, we found that this harassment of academic freedom stems from very specific contexts and the territories in which we are situated.

In the case of Guatemala, this occurs in a context where there is significant criminalization for defending university autonomy.

In the case of Chiapas, the interviewees told us about facing this risk at checkpoints and from the military. Transgender people have been suffering significant harassment and risk, and in the case of El Salvador, there is a limitation of constitutional guarantees that directly undermines academic freedom.

So, we find that there are multiple actors generating this assault on academic freedom—from authorities at higher education institutions, as well as churches, anti-rights groups, the military, and paramilitaries. In short, we are facing this assault

from various and multiple actors, with diverse manifestations that violate academic freedom.

Camilla Croso:

Very interesting.

Thank you very much, Ana Lucía. This reminds me of a fundamental point that Special Rapporteur Farida Shaheed has been emphasizing. She authored a 2024 report on academic freedom and the human right to education, in which she highlights what you've mentioned regarding the multiplicity of actors attacking academic freedom, and how the debate that you, Ana Lucía, and Anny are bringing to us here—which is fundamentally a debate about power—is intertwined with the various actors in our societies, and really makes us reflect on the need to devise very complex strategies to confront this group of actors.

So thank you very much for bringing that up.

Anny Ocoró Loango:

Based on what Ana Lucía mentioned and what you yourself said, I think what emerges from both studies is that academic freedom cannot be thought of solely as a formal right, because it must be understood through the realities present in our societies—that is, in racist, classist, and patriarchal societies—which clearly condition the exercise of freedom for certain actors. It is essential to consider these constraints and inequalities; racialization and gender inequalities are key to thinking about…

Epistemic hierarchies, authority, power, and structural exclusion

Camilla Croso:

Absolutely. Anny

I want to take a minute to celebrate how wonderful it is that the two of you are here right now in dialogue, as fellows of this program that CLAA runs in partnership with CLACSO, the Latin American Council of Social Sciences, which is enabling this dialogue of knowledge. That's the name of our podcast section, "Dialogue of Knowledge," and that's what this Fellowship does.

So it really brings together groups and research teams from across the Americas and gets us thinking together, because it's not just collective action, but collective reflection that helps us move forward much further.

So I'll continue along the lines we were already discussing: your research approaches, from different angles, *how knowledge is defined and legitimized within academia in contexts shaped by the epistemic hierarchies we've been discussing, the institutional power relations, and the structural dynamics of exclusion?*

Based on your experiences—on the one hand, analyzing the mechanisms of knowledge legitimation in the context of Chiapas, Guatemala, and El Salvador, and on the other,

the role of Afro-descendant organizations in knowledge production and political advocacy—epistemic authority is constructed today, and how these processes can reproduce or challenge hierarchies of gender, race, and power.

Let's start now with Ana Lucía—would that be okay, Ana?

Ana Lucía Ramazzini Morales:

Yes, of course, thank you, Camilla.

In fact, something I'd like to revisit that I think is important is what Anny was saying—how these are fields of contention, and where academia is situated within these fields of contention, and furthermore, as we propose in our research, how academia extends beyond higher education alone.

We analyzed that academia is not the only space where knowledge and thought are constructed; we have the artistic space, the literary space, and that is why we chose to focus our research specifically on women thinkers. Not just academics, breaking down and dismantling that notion of academia.

I'll return to this idea of spaces of contention. When we speak of academic freedom, academic freedom is a space of contention, where authority exists, because there are those who reproduce it through that hegemonic knowledge. We found in our research that critical female thinkers are not merely subjects of violence against academic freedom, but rather fundamental agents of resistance; that is, they do not passively receive this violence, but rather generate a series of practices of resistance, solidarity, and network-building to challenge all that hegemonic knowledge, and we believe this is fundamental.

Another element that I find very important to share with you and with those listening is how the constant resistance and transgression required to exercise academic freedom has led to psychosocial health issues, depression, weariness, a sense of being at the end of one's rope, interruptions in academic trajectories, withdrawal from artistic, literary, and higher education spaces, and fatigue and exhaustion. Some of them told us, "I've tried three times to get into the doctoral program and I can't do it," because the violence they've faced or the threats regarding the topics I'm researching have been too much, along with the harassment and bullying received in these spaces.

I think it's important in this discussion about how academic authority is reproduced to place this reflection at the center—how we need new ways to think about what to do, to prioritize self-care, social care, and sustaining those networks within these spaces. That emerged as a key finding in our research.

Camilla Croso:

Very interesting, Ana Lucía.

Anny, how do you see it?

Anny Ocoró Loango:

One thinks of the traditional channels through which that epistemic authority is constructed, which has to do with the way knowledge production circulates, all the issues of scientific evaluation that are often conceived through highly biased mechanisms, from a perspective that prioritizes only one form of knowledge, as Ana was pointing out, where, for example, the knowledge of Indigenous peoples or Afro-descendant communities is folklorized, deemed irrelevant, and only considered within that canon.

It is important to discuss this: what does it mean to do science today? Science in the service of what in our societies? Because, in any case, when one constructs knowledge, one is not merely describing a reality; rather, knowledge is constructed to challenge those interpretations of the world that are later translated into practice in society.

The associations have been discussing this, in the very interviews [referring to her research], the idea that Ana Lucía spoke of—spaces of care, safe spaces—emerged in relation to women: how to feel that other debates and other themes can circulate or be brought into circulation. Deconstructing epistemic authority in these contexts—or for those of us who start from the premise that hierarchies exist in our societies and that it is necessary to deconstruct them and fight against them.

It is necessary to consider other forms of epistemic authority that communities, societies, and movements have constructed. There is a lot of work on the idea that social movements are producers of knowledge—feminist movements, the Black movement; women highlighted this in the interviews—and how they are spaces for learning.

There is much talk of racial literacy, where one engages with other worldviews; this challenges and constructs alternative mechanisms of epistemic authority that legitimize these practices and these subjects in contexts where they have been delegitimized.

We also find this in the associations we researched: the production of journals, the circulation of other voices, which pluralize science and recognize other actors—and women play a central role there.

A very interesting avenue of work opened up for us. We had been working on this research into the role of these associations, and Camilla made a very interesting observation about highlighting the role of those Black women who have always been there, building these associations and producing knowledge.

There is a whole line of historiography that needs to be considered, because I believe that the possibility of building academic freedom requires rethinking, in historical terms, the contributions they have made, democratizing those conditions of knowledge production and what has been said about them.

Camilla Croso:

Fantastic. Very interesting, Ana Lucía and Anny.

Really thinking about what other collective spaces exist—your research, Anny, on associations—makes one think a lot about pluralizing the ways we wage our epistemic struggles and establish epistemic legitimacy by considering these other collective spaces you mention: associations, as well as movements. The whole issue of the languages in which things are published, where publications circulate—the actions we have and can take are quite diverse.

I wanted to highlight this issue of history because I want to raise a reflection here that we can develop later: the role of memory as something absolutely fundamental in the struggle for academic freedom. *What other stories have unfolded in the past? What happened in the past? How are we going to tell more stories to better understand, let's say, the struggles and events that perhaps no one knows happened?* So it's not just a matter of observing the present, but also of investigating the past.

Anny Ocoró Loango:

Moreover, that past intervenes in the present; it conditions it, so to speak. It has nourished subjectivities that are intervening in the present; it appears continuously; it is key. In other words, that past also moves forward here, to engage in dialogue with what we have.

Camilla Croso:

That's why we talk about memory and justice…

Anny Ocoró Loango:

That reminds me of Koselleck, the German scholar, who speaks of the contemporaneity of the contemporary—how what we sometimes think is left behind is actually present…

Ana Lucía Ramazzini Morales:

Moreover, it's about breaking away from the hegemonic configuration of time. From that past, present, and future as separate stages, toward something more in motion, where one nourishes the other. Yes, I completely agree.

Anny Ocoró Loango:

Of course, I agree that they influence—they influence the course of action in the present. Yes, clearly.

Recommendations for Epistemic Diversity and Cognitive Justice

Camilla Croso:

We're wrapping up our podcast with our final question, which builds on our earlier discussion of timelines and continuity—a discussion that looks toward the future and how we can act today to ensure fairer scenarios tomorrow.

There is an urgent need to transform structures that reproduce racial and gender inequalities, as well as to strengthen conditions that guarantee substantive academic freedom. These reflections point to the urgency of policies that recognize epistemic diversity and promote cognitive justice.

Based on your findings and experiences, *what priority recommendations would you formulate or offer for public policies that guarantee higher levels of formal inclusion and effective conditions for the full exercise of academic freedom in contexts marked by gender and racial inequalities?*

Ana Lucía Ramazzini Morales:

Just as we were discussing the interrelation of time, so too the interrelation of questions, because I've been thinking about it and I'm going to relate it to this question you're asking us—the process we went through as researchers conducting this study really resonates with me. Every time we met, it was a space where we shared our own experiences of having our academic freedom violated at that moment. That is, how research on these topics permeates your body and the experience you are living through, and how, for example, conducting research while parenting—which one of us is currently doing—somehow generates different times, possibilities, and ways of doing it. We talked about how we were personally experiencing violations of academic freedom in the spaces where we work or spend time; we think that's important.

Now, what can we do in the face of all this?

It is essential to take into account what we are experiencing—that is, to start from situated experiences. We need a public policy that incorporates these situated experiences, above all, as the interviewees told us, one that recognizes academic freedom as a right and its violation as a social and institutional problem.

In other words, we need to effectively revisit, above all, principles three and five of the Inter-American Principles on Academic Freedom, while relating them to the specific lived experiences of those of us in this open academy or engaged in knowledge production from different spaces and social movements.

A fundamental aspect is this recognition as a right and the recognition of its violation as a problem. We saw the need to promote other forms of dissemination, including all of this research we've conducted through feminist pedagogies and critical decolonial anti-racist approaches.

That is why our proposal for this dissemination involves, for example, translating this knowledge—which sometimes remains very abstract and high-level within academia—into something more accessible to the general public. Reaching other audiences, and we believe that doing so through an educational kit can help us reach precisely those other segments—why? Because we need to work on all these principles

of academic freedom from other spaces, and to do so within the realm of public policy, we need to translate everything that is proposed there.

In short, what I mean is that we need to keep developing different ways to reach different people who can help us transform social imaginaries surrounding the violence being experienced and how academic freedom is a key right. That has to be part of public policy. That is, we need to see how we can articulate policy and the transformation of imaginaries so that it can truly address the specific experiences where violence against academic freedom occurs, in this case, of critical thinkers in Chiapas, Guatemala, and El Salvador. This was something that came up frequently in the interviews we conducted and also in the initial feedback from a meeting we had with the interviewees; they insisted on the need to make this issue visible and to address it based on lived experiences, but to do so through a more targeted dissemination of knowledge to reach other spaces.

Camilla Croso:

Perfect, fantastic—brilliant ideas that you're sharing with us, thanks to Ana Lucía.

Anny, I'll leave the final word on the recommendations to you.

Anny Ocoró Loango:

We need to develop policies that address the racist and sexist biases we've identified in knowledge production. We need to move forward with these policies; it is essential to support associations and the research conducted by Afro researchers, to promote the involvement of women of African descent in existing science and technology policies in these countries, and to invest in this area because when you look at the figures and the data, investment in Latin America is very low. Brazil stands out among the countries in the region, but it is still very low.

We need policies that help decolonize and deracialize curricula, science and technology policies, to further stimulate epistemic pluralism, and to consider a proposal to strengthen academic freedom, based on the discussions we have been raising.

I believe that academic freedom here consists not only of conducting research without censorship, but also of ensuring that different subjects and traditions of knowledge have real conditions to produce knowledge, for that knowledge to circulate, and for it to be recognized within academia. A policy designed with that in mind. Thank you very much.

Camilla Croso:

Anny, thank you so much.

Before we wrap up, I want to highlight—just to remind everyone—what Ana Lucía mentioned about the Inter-American principles of academic freedom and university autonomy; I wanted to emphasize them for the listeners joining us today. We'll leave the link here so you can learn more about them; we are the only region in the world

that has regional or continental principles on the right to academic freedom, recognized as a human right. So it is a tool we have at our disposal to advance the struggle.

I want to conclude by thanking and truly congratulating you on your brilliant research and all the contributions that this research has provided, and thank you for being here on this inaugural podcast of the Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas. It has truly been a pleasure and an honor to have you join us at this moment.

We have reached the end of the first episode of the Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas' podcast, Voices of the Americas for Academic Freedom, in which we reflected using an intersectional approach, incorporating the dimensions of gender and race.

We reaffirm academic freedom as a principle and an indispensable condition for democracy, human rights, and the building of more just societies. In the context of the Americas, we will continue to foster critical and pluralistic dialogues that highlight both the threats and the resistance that shape the production of knowledge.

In this episode, we share that adopting an intersectional approach to gender and race allows us to understand that there is no full academic freedom without epistemic justice: guaranteeing it means ensuring that all voices, especially those historically marginalized, can research, teach, and transform the world without fear.

We remind you that this episode is supported by the Fellowship, a joint initiative of the CLAA and the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), which seeks to strengthen comparative research and critical thinking within the framework of academic freedom in the Americas.

Until next time, Camilla Croso, Director of the Coalition for Academic Freedom in the Americas (CLAA).