

POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM AND INTERSECTIONALITY: A reflection from CEINAV's research

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Introduction

- “Cultural encounters” are framed in theoretical borders interconnected with the experiences of women, migrant or not, that for some reason entered the national intervention against violence systems.
- From a feminist and postcolonial location, it's important to reflect on the subalternate position of women in the contexts where research is taking place. Despite the different historical, cultural, and political dynamics we found in the 4 countries, it's possible to observe a patriarchal, capitalist, and colonialist system in these contexts.

Our theoretical lenses (1)

- Gramsci's notion of subalternity, later developed by Spivak (1988), becomes useful to better understand the experiences of women survivors. Spivak later restricts this concept to only the most marginalized ones, however, for the reflection on the intervention against violence, the earlier notion could be more productive.
- There are different levels of subalternity if we cross gender oppression with "racial", ethnicity, sexuality, age, and other oppressions. Thus, it's crucial to avoid an essentialist notion of woman and femininity.

Our theoretical lenses (2)

- The theoretical base of our analysis refers to a collective subject of women, heterogeneous and fragmented, in the materiality of their (our) own stories and trajectories, both collective and personal, rejecting the construction of “women” as an “cultural and ideological composite Other” (Mohanty, 1988: 334). Liberal discourse presupposes, on the one hand, a citizen free from economic, physical and emotional constraints (James, 1992), and, on the other, the generalized victimization of women. In this sense, gender inequality demonstrates that women are differently positioned in the citizenship system.

Our theoretical lenses (3)

- Social and judicial policies sustained by mainstream gender perspectives emphasize the socially built notion of women as “educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own choices” (Mohanty 1988: 337). This ideal model of “women” serves to construct, in a hierarchical and oppositional relation, the *other* woman (3rd World Women) that are seen as “sexually constrained, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented” (Ibid.).

Our theoretical lenses (4)

- This process of conceptualization of women leads to different levels of victimization in the experiences of violence and intervention pathways.
- In the analysis of systems of intervention against violence, it becomes crucial to have as a basis the postcolonial feminist perspectives, that allow us to overcome the limitations that derive from the colonial processes of power and therefore avoid reproducing the same hegemonic narratives and the epistemic violence underlying the liberal notions of multiculturalism (Spivak, 1988).

Coloniality

- Postcolonial feminist perspectives denounced the colonial processes of power and the epistemic violence (Spivak, 1988) of hegemonic narratives and neoliberal notions underlying “benign” multiculturalism (Torres, 2001).
- Mainstream postcolonial theories brought forward the concept of coloniality to mention the production of knowledge and meaning of the world in modernity. Modernity and Luminism times developed this form of power – coloniality – that recreates dominance dynamics under civilizational racist assumptions (Quijano, Mignolo, 2000).

Coloniality

- However, these postcolonial perspectives fail by focusing on racism as the primary form of exclusion, neglecting the patriarchal roots of the colonial power. Feminist postcolonial perspectives defend that gender is a structural element (and not subordinate) of coloniality, i. e. a colonial category on its own, which allows to historicize patriarchy, shedding light over how heteronormativity, capitalism and racial classification are superimposed (Costa, 2010: 50).

Intersectionality

- Intersectionality, developed by feminist theories, is likewise a crucial theoretical matrix in CEINAV. The suppression of difference in identity-based policies is problematic because the experiences of violence of many women are influenced by many dimensions of their identities such as “race”, class and others (Crenshaw, 1992). Intersectionality is fundamental to the understanding of how different forms of oppression based on gender, race/ethnicity, sexuality, age and other exclusion categories underlying the colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist power system are interconnected in the western contexts.

Intersectionality

- In the intervention systems, project CEINAV identified several dilemmas in intervention against violence that arise from the limitations of the judicial and legal systems and the difficulties faced by the professionals of different fields, especially when confronted with migrant women or women from cultural contexts different from the deemed dominant culture.

Final remark

- Family, intimacy, affection and desire are under a process of change and the intervention against violence is part of this shift and (re)construction.
- We are participating in this paradigm change, and across the way, we also intend to **change how women and children are viewed in our society(ies)**, challenging the subjectification and **projecting a liberated and more just world for all.**

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