

Women of Violence: Towards a Corporal Decoloniality

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ABSTRACT

This proposal interrogates the psychic elemental structures of violence (Segato, 2003) that has institutionalized the colonialism of power (Santiago Castro-Gómez, 2017; Quijano, 2000) enroll in the bodies and their practice of discrimination to women. In this regard, there have existed conditions of emergency and genealogical origin of violence that had testified, not only as unconscious structural damage but also has legitimized ways of sexual normativity relating to the women's victimization to keep their bodies vulnerable (Butler, 2005). Furthermore, an education of vulnerability goes through the corporal territories that have been abused as a way of preserve certain "ignorance" from women to hold their lack of defense and, like this, file a figure of feminism (Dorlin, 2017). To develop this theoretical axis, my proposal focuses on the Latin-American reality as well as a continent of colonial/oppressive memory regarding hetero/racial previously mentioned in the dominated and discriminated bodies, despite the performative crossways practices of resistance that had changed the political horizon. From this point of view, the objective of explores and understands the intersectionality between violence, corporality and decolonization starting from the theoretical axes expressed above, allowed us to understand the way of how hegemonic practices have been woven in Latin-America and, from there, be able to critically analyses the process of decolonization by emancipated fights that consecrate a reflection around the corporal auto defense, not only as a mechanism of resistance but also, and even yet, as a way of connection between the body and the affirmation of itself from a women's point of view.

Keywords: Violence, Decolonization, Body, Vulnerability, Performativity, Defense, Emancipation

INTRODUCTION

The formulation of a critical perspective of the coloniality of power inscribed as a mode of violence in the corporeality of women has been the central axis to give its own stamp to the drifts/limits of a feminist and decolonial thought that has laid the foundations on the questioning of the sexual dissidence of the hegemonic heterosexual matrix. In this regard, the works of Rita Segato offer an interesting approach to think about the historical-cultural character of dependency, internal colonialism and its elementary structures of violence, as well as to reflect on the pedagogies of oppression and see how the demands and their implications in emancipatory processes circulate in Latin America. Consequently, her works break out as a sign of these times; more particularly, they expose the skin of the contemporary world concerning the perspectives of gender and decoloniality. Thus, one of the greatest virtues of Segato is, without a doubt, to transcend the geocolonial frontiers of power and violence in women in general and, in particular, in Latin

America by granting new critical epistemologies whose vocabularies configure more localized glances again, giving a change of direction to the understanding of universal discourse, and less hegemonic knowledge.

On the other hand, Maria Lugones in her text dedicated to the de-coloniality of the genre proposes the thesis of relating the categories of gender, class, race, and sexuality too, at the same time, elaborate a critique on the devices of power and knowledge that have institutionalized the sex-gender system. It is a matter, through that intersection, of developing a critical listening that arises from a crisis of the same listening with respect to the ethico-political (im)possibility of assuming the discourses of the processes of racialization and institutionalization of a patriarchal gender-sex system inscribed, in my opinion, in an unconscious mode (Lagarde, 2005). In this sense, Lugones raises the visibility of the violence inflicted on coloured women, and that has been completely indifferent to the male gaze who even suffers discrimination and racial domination in Latin America. In this respect, the “non-white” woman, namely, the “coloured women” (Lugones, 75, 2008), are also victims of the gender coloniality, that is, Western and hegemonic feminist discourses.

Indeed, for Lugones to speak of “coloured women” does not connote a racial feature, much less a reaction to colonial domination, but rather, it is about an action movement horizontally agreed, which means, not the search for a differentiating identity with a “community unity” profile but the implementation of an organic coalition of women protagonists of the colonial discourse who, from their subordinate place, have developed a voice from the borders of de-coloniality. Therefore, this coalition is open to the intercultural interaction of resistance to the aforementioned intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality as marks of subjection, oppression, and domination that have shaped and reduced subjectivities.

Likewise, and taking up the analysis of Segato, in the book “The elementary structures of violence,” the author points out the inscription of an elementary psychic unit of violence that has standardized those feminine subjectivities. In other words, there is a model of understanding violence that comes from unconscious psychic dynamics that emerge in deeply rooted cultural and social contexts, whose maximum expression is the mandate of rape. In effect, the idea of mandate refers to the imperative of the reproduction of the symbolic economy of masculine power over feminine and how this allows the hierarchy and legitimation of patriarchy. Consequently, for

Segato, that act is necessary for the restoration of power, a power that expresses itself, as Foucault would say, in the micro power where the circuits of desire go through the skin. In this sense, the principles of violence do not necessarily have to do, according to the author, with the victim/victimizer relationship, as it has been judicially and socially legitimized, between men and women, but it has to do with the male relationship amongst peers to demonstrate the status of the genre regarding the role of power. In this way, the condition of equals that generates the relations of competition results from the demonstration of the domination of those who occupy the weakest place that, in this case, it is the social and cultural place denoted to the figure of a woman. Obviously, the author scrutinizes through the representations, the speeches coined by the cultures and gender practices that have allowed access to the symbolic economy that installs the patriarchal regime, from there, to rise to the ideological analysis that sustains it.

Consequently, patriarchy is the name that determines the structural and hierarchical order of empirically observable positions. However, it moves through a significant chain where the language and modes of representation generate cross-linking and mobilities of the same signifiers that, although within the permanent structure of the patriarchal representation remain stable, the truth is that Segato tries to announce that there is a circulation of signifiers that, within the hierarchical structures of power that have organized and given them a meaning, allow to open gaps and question the hegemony of violence personified as power.

To be fair, we can see here an economics of inscribed violence at the psychic level, since by taking the idea of significant mobility within a permanent structure such as the unconscious disposition, the truth is that what Segato tries to sustain is that the patriarchy is not only determined culturally and socially but, moreover, unconsciously in the sense that organizes and distributes the affects, desires, bodies, and values that are expressed in the social roles. In this sense, the place of the patriarch is a location at the symbolic level as it intersects in variable signifiers in the course of the social interactions. For this reason, the patriarchy is the norm and project of self-production and, as such, its purpose emerges from a bodily “listening” in the sense of the skin, of color, in short, of the race whose manifestation is sensitive to the relations of power and the subtlest discursive expressions.

Consequently, Segato establishes a differentiating scale amongst the symbolic level of patriarchy, the discursive level where the representations of the ideology of the current genre are

fixed and the level of its uses and practices. Thus, according to Segato, there can be noticed a control and forms of censorship on the part of the patriarchy in the order of the discursive symbolization, in which the signifiers are disciplined and organized by categories that obey the patriarchal system and whose consequence is the framing of their practices through the demand of desire. However, in this censored order of symbolization, some moments of fluidity that fracture the disciplined regime of the signifiers appear and make possible ambivalences and circulations that resist being framed in the submission of the heterosexual matrix.

Now, to examine the connection of the affections, the desires and their libidinal investments in the order of the disciplining of the signifiers at the unconscious level and expressed in the patriarchal symbolism, is not easy to observe in an empirical and ethnographic way. In effect, the ways of exercising vulnerability practices are and have been a key mechanism to maintain the reproduction of the power and the connection of the affects within the libidinal economy. In this sense, Elsa Dorlin elaborates on an extremely interesting work to raise this focus of violence by controlling the idea of femininity.

This intervention gathers the discussions and important contributions of authors who have problematized the body, the violence and its colonialist strategies of vulnerability to keep women not only under the focus of victimization but also to maintain a certain pedagogy of power with respect to the figure of femininity, namely, feminized and feminine bodies. Thus, from these discussions, I will try to observe the Latin American reality as a continent of the colonial/oppressive memory of the hetero/racial ones expressed in the dominated and discriminated bodies, nevertheless, crossed by performative practices of resistance that have changed the horizon of the political.

WOMEN OF VIOLENCE: AN INTERSECTION BETWEEN POLICIES OF VULNERABILITY AND CORPORAL COLONIALISM

To begin, I will start by pointing out what Elsa Dorlin raises about the figure of femininity as a practice of domination and form of normativization to maintain, through victimization, the vulnerability of women. From this perspective, she supports the idea of a philosophy of violence as a mechanism of resistance and defense that allows a connection between the body and the assertion of itself.

In view of this approach, the author proposes that the defense, particularly self-defense, is

a paradoxical mechanism in the sense that the more the body defends itself, the more it is exposed to its annihilation. In other words, the technique employed there focuses on the subject's ability to act in the face of a dangerous situation or, in extreme cases, of death to master precisely that reaction. In effect, the repressive devices, beyond showing the bodily reactions, try to put on the same level the domain of the defense and the failure of the subject. What is involved here is the exposure of self-defense expressed in the way of corporal control of suffering and pain. However, this reaction is precisely the staging of the subjective domain of the defense to survive in certain situations where the repressive authority allows to govern these bodies. Thus, the deadly domain of the body, in its exercise of self-defense, takes place within such an economy of means of subsistence that, in this situation, the body itself is exposed to death. Consequently, the more the defense appears, the more the body will suffer.

If we illustrate this with the case of rape, as Rita Segato examines it, the effectiveness of the defense by the woman is precisely the point of submission of the control of her vital movements, whose first point of corporal impact without any doubt will be the genitalia. In effect, what happens in that situation is a mechanism of power codification in the sense that her genitals become the place where the domain of masculine acting is hidden. Given this, defending the genital parts is defending oneself; nevertheless, to reach this defense, it is necessary to break what the woman is capable of defending. As a result, this fracture is the place of vulnerability and the expression of standardised femininity through the figure of "subjects of law," although that legal figure is still maintained as corporal control under the idea of victimization.

Even more, when Elsa Dorlin proposes the thesis of a philosophy of violence as a vector of self-defense, she is pointing out the idea that starting from the unarmed bodies, the status of the indefensible appears and therefore those bodies are left without defense. Now, that kind of corporal "disarmament" allows the use of violence for one's own defense. Even Dorlin, in her book devoted to the philosophy of violence, states that there is a powerful technology that manufactures subjects that incite their power to act in order to contain them in all their heteronomy. In this sense, that power to act, although it revolves around the defense of life, the truth is that it is a machine of discipline and colonial punishment. In other words, the author will point out : "le moindre geste de défense et de protection, mobilize mouvement de préservation et de conservation de soi est mis

au service de l'anéantissement même du corps" (2017, 7).

As a result, behind those gestures of defense there is a power that is exercised towards the same power of the subject to act, which is expressed in the exercise of the defense of his/her life what constitutes a self-defense act while this is the expression itself of the bodily life, as that which makes a subject, as that which makes a life.

In this way, a defense implies a suffering of colonial submission, equivalent at the same time to the body dying due to exhaustion of itself. After all, it is a mechanism of action "unfortunate" to the extent that, this action brings to light certain doubts, anxieties, and fears concerning the way to make resistance, namely, if it is worth it or not as well as the forms of self-representation, that is if at the moment of exercising self-defense this leads to loss. Finally, if those experiences involve an effect of self-reflection in a mirror where what is produced there is precisely the action/reaction itself, then what Dorlin analyzes is the implementation of a technique whose base lies then in a work of coercive incorporation of the deadly dimension of the domain of the subject, in the particular case of women, which will lead to their own suspension only out of their own struggle to stay alive. Thus, at the same time that this technique affirms a movement of self-defense, it becomes a threat or, rather, a promise of death (case of rape) or submission (case of colonization).

To a certain extent, Dorlin's analysis allows us to notice that there is an economy of abuse where the violated body ends up being its own executioner. Undoubtedly, this has led to the definition of the ability to defend oneself. However, this capacity for self-defense is also a criterion that has become a way of discriminating between those who are fully subject of law and the others, namely, those who have been reduced and annihilated, to de-legitimize their capacity of self-defense. In this way, those who defend their bodies will be exposed to the risk of death as a way to instill in them their inability to defend themselves, which would lead to their radical impotence.

Such would be the case of the figure of the victim in the role of femininity. Moreover, the domain of acting is the focus that defines power; it is a defensive mode of government that mobilizes a mechanic where being without defense does not necessarily mean not being able to exercise power but, rather, making the experience of a domain of acting where the self-defense is a way of proceeding that leads to certain subjects to annihilate and exercise their own loss. It is with this that one could speak of a file of the domination of the heterocolonial and racial matrix,

by defending it as its own contradiction and expressed in various modes of vulnerability, especially in the case of colonization and racialization processes in Latin America.

This is the question proposed by Judith Butler in her text *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Here, Butler defends the idea that in the political body, there are also those suffering, excluded, or object bodies. Indeed, it is rather, for Butler, to place the vulnerability in the bosom of our way of thinking the social and political and to affirm that a body is political due to the vulnerability that affects it.

“Nous sommes, en tant que corps, vulnérables face aux autres et aux institutions, et cette vulnérabilité constitue un aspect de la socialité à travers laquelle les corps subsistent. The question of ma ou de votre vulnérabilité nous inscrit dans un problème politique plus large d'égalité et d'inégalité, puisque la vulnérabilité peut être projetée et déniée (catégories psychologiques), mais aussi exploitée et manipulée (social catégories et économiques) dans le processus de production et de naturalization des formes de l'inégalité sociale” (p.92).

Butler insists on the importance of not demoralizing the politics through a political action that recovers the condition and vulnerable situation of women as living bodies. In this sense, the possibility of transforming the patriarchal social structures that, in the case of Latin America, are part of a colonial/racist pattern, necessarily involves not limiting the resistance practices, but rather considering the political action of resistance through the vulnerability mode. In other words, thinking over the forms taken by social movements in Latin America, through the political action, means considering politics as a corporality that gives rise to the precarious and vulnerable lives of the excluded and colonized women which implies an exercise of de-colonability set in motion that translates the structural fragilization of certain layers of the population, whose subjective experience has been denied. So that it opens the perspective to an emancipatory strategy, that is to say, one that thinks to place the de-coloniality up to the point of articulation between lived worlds and instituted forms, making this bond a political project of full right.

The reflection of Judith Butler places the interrogation on vulnerability at the center of what a life does, a life worthy of being considered and apprehended. In other words, the condition and situation of vulnerability mobilize less the reflection on the question of who the victim is and more on the question of the conditions under which certain colonial visions determine the individuals to judge whether certain masculine and colonial practices are subject of a lynching or victims of aggression. From this point of view, Butler claims, from the Fanonian thought, that what must be the object of a critical analysis, is not the logic of the contradictory oppositions that revolve

around the discourse of the patriarchal symbolism, but the picture of intelligibility of perceptions that are never immediate, but operate within a field of racially saturated and incardinated visibility, sexually standardised and colonially determined.

Now, Butler's proposal is to rethink a bodily ontology by means of the interrogation of the affective and ethical dispositions that operate by a selective and differential approach to violence. From this point of view, the demand of the bodies facing and exposed to life is to be expressed and heard in the framework of a political action that makes the vulnerability of women not entirely passive, but as an agency capable of offering resistance.

To finish, I return to Lugones's analysis to examine not only the coloniality of the genre but, moreover, to be able to emphasize the decolonial processes through emancipatory struggles that consecrate a reflection around the corporal self-defense, not only as a mechanism of resistance but also, moreover, as a form of connection to the body and self-affirmation of the woman's self. For this purpose, I propose de-coloniality as a philosophical place of saying where a sort of "poetic" indiscipline of corporality is traversed within practices of dispossession.

TO GO OUT OF THE CAPTIVITY: BODIES DE-COLONIALITY

Lugones who points out that there is a hierarchical dichotomy between the "human and the non-human" as a central axis of colonial modernity. In this respect, the colonization of Latin America and the Caribbean was imposed within a dichotomous and hierarchical distinction on the colonized at the service of the western subject/man. This distinction became the mark of the human and of civilization where the indigenous peoples and, particularly the non-white women, were enslaved under a taxonomy as non-humans in their species, that is, as sexually uncontrollable and wild animals. Thus, modern European, bourgeois, colonial man became a subject/agent, able to govern in public life within an ontological framework of a Being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, namely, a Being of mind and reason.

For its part, the bourgeois European woman was not understood as her complement but as someone who reproduced race and capital through their sexual purity, their passivity and their attachment to the home, the family at the service of the white man.

Within this perspective, Elsa Dorlin, in her text "The Matrix of Race" proposes a genealogical and reciprocal journey of the notions of sex and race, affirming that the two concepts

are the result of the same corporal matrix. In effect, this genealogy rejects the question of the nation and the state, which, in turn, evokes the idea of health of the white body, but not only as a device of domination in relation to the black body but also because of the political importance of the motherhood and procreation of the citizens that symbolize the body of the nation. In this sense, one could speak there of a hetero/racial memory whose colonial matrix is, precisely, the putting in place of a sexual/racial temperament of bodily power through health and illness. Consequently, the imposition of these dichotomous categories, following Lugones, was interwoven with the historicity of relations, including the sphere of intimacy.

Given that the sphere of intimacy has been considered only from the sexual dimension within the private space of the family, I gather here the approaches of Marcela Lagarde who examines, in her book entitled: “Los cuativerios de las mujeres: monjas, madrespasa, putas, presas y locas” the various forms of captivity through which femininity ends up being what defines the woman of violence within what she calls institutionalized feminicide. In this perspective, Lagarde highlights the impact that violence has had in Latin America through the formation of an awareness of oppression whose psychic factor is related to desire and to the intimate interactions of the social life interwoven by people. In this way, Lagarde explores the relationship between subjectivity and the belief system concerning women, which has mobilized certain representations that the author classifies them into oppressive phenomena expressed in symbols embodied in the uniqueness of each woman.

On the one hand, those phenomena are expressed in the image of mother/wife; then, in the figure of the nun under the must-be of guilt and the sacred prohibition; later, the personality of the whore linked to the corporal exchange whose effect is to be an erotic object; finally, the mad for trying to transgress the order of meaning built historically on them, namely, that is shaped to be part of the others, that is, formed under a subjectivity defined from the dependence, from the establishment of the link with others to achieve recognition: thus, try to transgress this logic of meaning is to discover the captivity and to try to get out of there.

Therefore, each form of oppression, typified in those various images, represents the house and the family where the masculine domination, the convent, the brothel, the prison, and the insane asylum are exerted as spaces of captivity. Indeed, Lagarde maintains in her book that women have been in captivity through certain phenomena of oppression that are exerted to subordination,

discrimination, inferiority and dependence and that these phenomena have been institutionalized in the ways of life and in the culture.

Now, this does not mean that these circles of coexistence are lived with pain, on the contrary, they are legitimized in such a way that they appear under the mask of loyalty, dedication and self-denial that places women in a specific place: the home, the specific cares that define sexuality linked to the maternal instinct, what gives as a result, for Lagarde, the reification of a split subjectivity that has been determined by those mechanisms of oppression translated by modes of agency that inscribe what she called as captivity. It would be, rather, generic oppression incardinated in the behaviors and attitudes that are observed in a positive way when that oppression is valued by dependence, subjection, servitude, subordination and impotence as they appear as feminine and not political virtues.

For its part, the mode of captivity is not only analyzed by the author through what I have already described but, moreover, Lagarde maintains that oppression is in the woman when she obeys the patriarchal mandate and sees the transgression, in experiencing and daring to do actions that seem to be impossible. So that captivity is defined by Lagarde as a way of life, it is there where it emerges and whose procedure is in the gendered cultures. In this sense, women are forced to reproduce the conditions and gender identities.

On the basis of these ideas exposed, I dare to suggest that Lagarde supports the thesis that, although there is a historical gender condition of women, the truth is that this condition is specified by different life situations in degrees and levels of oppression and, for this, violence. To specify those levels of oppression, the author distinguishes, within the situations of a particular life, the levels of oppression of class, ethnicity, religion, and gender. From this perspective, Lagarde poses the problem of how human beings are generically created, not only by gender but also by class, ethnicity, race, etc. In this respect, Lagarde argues that women are specifications of essential axes of gender whose condition is structured by their split sexuality and by the power that signified them as an affirmation or as the subjection of others. Here is the way power defines them, whose connotation is the vital dependence on subjection, subordination and voluntary servitude to the world.

For these reasons, and to sum up, I will emphasize that the author focuses her attention on the problem of oppression by differentiating it, theoretically and methodologically, from

exploitation. It is true that there is sexual exploitation and that the conditions of exploitation of women could be attributed to capitalism. However, Lagarde points out that exploitation, although it belongs to an economic domain and that there are indeed particular conditions of exploited women; the truth is that oppression goes deeper since it concerns gendered oppression where all women, regardless of their class or ethnicity or a particular way of life, are subject. This is important to emphasize because Lagarde affirms a critique that revolves around the idea that it is usually thought that gender violence goes through exploitation mechanisms linked to conditions of economic and class precariousness. On the contrary, Lagarde speaks of a “differential oppression,” referring to the fact that customs, traditions, regional characteristics, class differences, etc. make oppression appear under multiple expressions. Consequently, all women are subject to gender oppression, even when there are groups of women from well-off classes and who enjoy certain economic, cultural, educational, etc. privileges believing that they are free from oppression.

I close my paper, raising the question about how to think decolonial bodies. Concerning this, I propose that it is necessary to emphasize historically embodied intersubjectivity that allows a critique of the gendered, racialized, colonial and heterosexual capitalist oppression as a form of lived transformation of the social. In opposition to the dichotomous hierarchy that characterizes the capitalist and modern coloniality, I propose the movement towards the coalition that conveys the impulse to know each other as if in a relationship, in alternative socialisations and based on tense and creative ways of inhabiting the colonial difference.

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