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Decolonial Feminism: María Lugones' influences and contributions

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Abstract: Hierarchies of knowledge can be noticed in feminist studies, particularly between dominant/mainstream feminisms, generally from the Global North, and subaltern feminisms from the Global South. Subaltern feminisms seek to unmask the social-racial-geopolitical limitations of mainstream feminisms, forging feminisms more plural and inclusive. María Lugones is considered one of the most important representatives of subaltern feminisms in the Latin American decolonial debate. The purpose of this paper is to present the trajectory of María Lugones, particularly focusing on the discussion of her works and theories on Coloniality of Gender and Decolonial Feminism. Her works are fundamental for gender discussions from a decolonial perspective, and further debate is necessary on her important contributions.

Keywords: María Lugones; Decolonial Feminism; Coloniality of Gender; Colonial-Modern Gender System; Plural Feminisms.

Feminismo Decolonial: influências e contribuições de María Lugones

Resumo: Hierarquias de conhecimento podem ser percebidas nos estudos feministas, particularmente entre feminismos dominantes / mainstream, geralmente do Norte Global, e feminismos subalternos do Sul Global. Os feminismos subalternos visam desmascarar as limitações sócio-raciais-geopolíticas dos feminismos dominantes, construindo feminismos mais plurais e inclusivos. María Lugones é considerada uma das mais importantes representantes dos feminismos subalternos, e pertence ao debate decolonial latino-americano. O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar a trajetória de María Lugones, focando particularmente na discussão de suas obras e teorias sobre a Colonialidade de Gênero e Feminismo Decolonial. Seus trabalhos são fundamentais para as discussões de gênero sob a perspectiva decolonial, sendo necessário um maior debate sobre suas importantes contribuições.

Palavras-chave: María Lugones; Feminismo Decolonial; Colonialidade de Gênero; Sistema Colonial-Moderno de Gênero; Feminismos Plurais.

Feminismo Decolonial: influencias y aportes de María Lugones

Resumen: Las jerarquías del conocimiento se pueden ver en los estudios feministas, particularmente entre feminismos dominantes / mainstream, generalmente del Norte Global, y feminismos subalternos del Sur Global. Los feminismos subalternos apuntan a desenmascarar las limitaciones socio-raciales-geopolíticas de los feminismos dominantes, construyendo feminismos más plurales e inclusivos. María Lugones es considerada una de las representantes más importantes de los feminismos subalternos, y pertenece al debate descolonial latinoamericano. El objetivo de este artículo es presentar la trayectoria de María Lugones, con especial atención a la discusión de sus trabajos y teorías sobre la Colonialidad de Género y el Feminismo Decolonial. Sus trabajos son fundamentales para las discusiones de género desde una perspectiva descolonial, requiriendo un mayor debate sobre sus importantes aportes.

Palabras clave: María Lugones; Feminismo descolonial; Colonialidad de género; Sistema de género colonial-moderno; Feminismos plurales.

Introduction

The conquest of the Americas took place in several fields: from territorial colonization to cultural, economic, religious, and knowledge impositions, excluding plural knowledges produced from the borders (Catherine WALSH, 2007a). Based on the conquerors' logic, a linear and universal narrative was forged to legitimize a global coloniality, currently based mainly on neoliberal paradigms (Madina TLOSTANOVA and Walter MIGNOLO, 2009). According to Walter Mignolo (2011), the universal narrative is maintained and reproduced by global linear thinking, which inaugurated the idea of Westernization itself, mapping "not only the land and waters of the planet, but also the minds" (MIGNOLO, 2011, p. 79).

Colonial-Western knowledge, to legitimize its artificial universalization, had to be de-localized, de-historicized and de-politicized; its Eurocentric origins needed to be concealed. Thus, modernity is not a universal concept, but a regional one, with the limitations that its historical, cultural, political, and geographical contexts impose (TLOSTANOVA and MIGNOLO, 2012). The limitations intrinsic to Eurocentric-Western-colonial paradigms, however, did not prevent modernity from imposing itself on plural realities, allowing only one logic to be considered "true" science. Particularly in academia, the production of knowledge (and its Western canons) becomes homogeneous and detached from local realities, silencing plural epistemologies produced by the "others" (WALSH, 2007b).

Such hierarchies of knowledge (mainstream/dominant knowledge versus subaltern knowledge) can also be noticed in feminist studies, particularly between dominant/mainstream feminisms, generally from the Global North, and subaltern feminisms from the Global South (Heloísa Buarque de HOLLANDA, 2020). According to Gayatri Spivak (2010), mainstream feminisms are almost always produced by privileged women from dominant social groups, and those feminisms work according to these women's interests and agenda, rarely dialoguing with unprivileged women, such as proletariat workers, women of color, immigrants, homosexuals, prisoners (Gayatri SPIVAK, 2010), or subaltern women from the Global South (HOLLANDA, 2020; María LUGONES, 2020a).

Decolonial feminism, on the other hand, is focused on the discussions centered on coloniality and colonial differences based on gender. Coloniality of gender thus incorporates discussions on intersectionality and intersexuality, including critical discussions on the limitations of binary sex logics, hegemonic heteronormativity, hierarchies of race and social conditions (LUGONES, 2020a). By understanding the coloniality of gender, it is possible to better comprehend the classification between human and non-human that is imposed in favor of white, Eurocentric, bourgeois, heterosexual and Christian men (LUGONES, 2010).

Therefore, feminism from a decolonial perspective questions and brings to light women's issues with a broader, more inclusive field of action, which is not limited to discussions, for instance, of neoliberal feminists (for more comments on neoliberal/white/mainstream feminisms, see Catherine ROTTENBERG, 2017; Suvi KESKINEN, 2018; Alison PHIPPS, 2021), whose struggle is focused on the under-(or problematic)representation of White women in different contexts, such as the workplace, politics, or international organizations. It is not the intention here to question the importance of mainstream feminisms in certain contexts; however, they have been proven incapable of discussing issues such as systemic racism, violence against women of color and social and historical issues particular to Latin American plural realities (HOLLANDA, 2020).

María Lugones is considered one of the most important representatives of Latin American feminism who belongs to the decolonial debate (Marina WASSMANSDORF, 2016). She is an Argentine who built her academic career and developed her feminist theories mainly in the United States (US), focusing on the gap in decolonial debates on gender, thus proposing the notion of a colonial-modern gender system (Luciana BALLESTRIN, 2017). Her analysis on feminism is mainly on race-and-gender-based oppressions, developing "a salient position in the field of decolonial feminism, a topic with a rich theoretical and political history" (Ofelia SHUTTE, 2020, p. 103).

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present the trajectory of María Lugones, particularly focusing on her works, theories and authors/theories/discussions that influenced her while forging the concepts of Coloniality of Gender and Decolonial Feminism. Her works are fundamental for gender discussions from a decolonial perspective, and further debate is necessary on her important contributions. In this work, considering my limitation of space, I will focus the discussions on Lugones' contributions on the second "phase" of her trajectory (from mid-2000s onward), when her theorization was based on the decolonial perspective.

After these introductory comments, the rest of the paper is divided into four more sections. Section 2 presents Lugones' main works and discussions. Section 3 analyzes the main points of Lugones' theory of Coloniality of Gender. Section 4 discusses Lugones propositions for a Decolonial Feminism and offers examples of four authors that influenced her theory. Finally, in Section 5 (final considerations), I briefly present my suggestions for future horizons on studies about María Lugones and her theories.

Brief comments on María Lugones' works and trajectory

The dominant Western geopolitics of knowledge are not imposed exclusively by elitist groups in the Global North, but it is also reproduced within the Global South both by the Right and the Left, further marginalizing critical knowledges that reflect the realities of indigenous, Afros and mestizos (WALSH, 2007c). Latin American peoples thus analyze their own realities from colonial-hegemonic-Western paradigms. Modernity, in this case, hampers frameworks and cognitive structures built from and by "other" loci of enunciation (Alexandra FIGUEROA, 2005).

According to Western-colonial geopolitics, which influence both epistemological and ontological dimensions, the legitimacy of "humanity" can be associated with their origins, social class, color, gender, or other criteria within a given society (Nelson MALDONADO-TORRES, 2007). Thus, a person's race ("white", "indigenous", "black") establishes their hierarchical position within the framework of the social division of labor, helping to maintain and perpetuate racial / colonial differences (Carolina DELGADO, 2007).

From a decolonial perspective, gender issues also permeate discussions of racism, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. María Lugones, who passed away in 2020, has been publishing papers that discuss gender issues since the late 1980s and the early 1990s (e.g.: LUGONES, 1987; 1990). However, it was mainly from the mid-2000s onwards that she began publishing research that was more focused on the construction of her theory on decolonial feminism (SCHUTTE, 2020).

Before the mid-2000s, Lugones' focus was on plural feminisms, especially for women of color. Her 1992 paper was dedicated to interpreting Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*, in which she explains how Anzaldúa was important to her insights, stating that she: "carried Anzaldúa's insights and metaphors with me for several years in my daily ruminations and in my daily exercise of triple vision" (LUGONES, 1992, p. 31). Unfortunately, despite Anzaldúa's relevant influence on Lugones' first ruminations on feminism, the author would appear less and less in Lugones' future works, especially after the mid-2000s.

In 2003, María Lugones (2003) published a book called *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, a collection of her (then) most famous essays, in which she writes from her perspective as an inhabitant of different worlds, exploring the possibility of deep coalition with other women of color, based on multiple understandings of oppressions and resistances. She would deeply discuss the "impure mestiza" (SCHUTTE, 2020), explaining how she wrote from a dark place, according to her: "a place where I see white/Angla women as 'on the other side,' on 'the light side'" (LUGONES, 2003, p. 65), while she was writing from a place of pilgrimage, a place "in between".

Still in the 2000s, Lugones (2007) would publish a paper called "Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system", discussing Quijano's theory on the coloniality of power and how it forges the global capitalist system of power. By adopting Quijano's theoretical background, the author defends a global capitalist system of gender, also constituted by modern / colonial forms of oppression, legitimized by the "civilized" and naturally superior "Western" epistemologies.

In 2010, she would publish one of her most famous papers on decolonial feminism, in which she explains that, in her previous paper "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (LUGONES 2007), she proposed the relation between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of gender, race, and sexuality, by rereading the modern capitalist colonial system. In her 2010 paper, she continues exploring the colonial opposition of gender, explaining how this theme is relevant discussions on ecology, economics, government, spirituality, and knowledge. She proposes a framework "not as an abstraction from lived experience, but as a lens that enables us to see what is hidden from our understandings of both race and gender and the relation of each to normative heterosexuality" (LUGONES, 2010, p. 742).

Finally, in 2020, María Lugones's classic text "Coloniality and Gender" (Colonialidade e Gênero in Portuguese), considered one of the references in decolonial feminism, would be published in the book *Feminist Thought Today: Decolonial Perspectives (Pensamento Feminista Hoje: Perspectivas Decoloniais* in Portuguese). This paper is the product of an investigation on the intersectionality of race-class gender-sexuality, which was conducted by the author at the State University of New York, in Binghamton (LUGONES, 2020a). In the author's own words (LUGONES, 2008, p. 1):

"I am interested in the intersection of race, class, gender and sexuality in a way that enables me to understand the indifference that men, but, more importantly to our struggles, men who have been racialized as inferior, exhibit to the systematic violences inflicted upon women of color. I want to understand the construction of this indifference so as to make it unavoidably recognizable by those claiming to be involved in liberatory struggles. [...] The indifference is found both at the level of everyday living and at the level of theorizing of both oppression and liberation. The indifference seems to me not just one of not seeing the violence because of the categorial separation of race, gender, class, and sexuality.

María Lugones has published many other relevant works in which she discusses themes related to decolonial feminism and the coloniality of gender. Here, I will give just one more example. I would like to highlight her paper “Gender and Universality in Colonial Methodology” (LUGONES, 2020b). In it, she presents a decolonial methodology that questions the colonial-modern-Eurocentric paradigms of gender that are imposed as universal, and that is focused on studying groups of peoples who are either silenced or ignored by dominant feminisms, and live at the colonial difference (LUGONES, 2020b).

Coloniality of gender

In this section, I will analyze some decolonial theories, concepts and discussions that served as theoretical background for Lugones’ theory on the Coloniality of Gender. Therefore, I will discuss (1) how Lugones adopted Quijano’s coloniality of power to analyze what she calls the colonial / modern system of gender; (2) how colonial differences are related to the artificial and colonial construction of gender categories; (3) how colonial resistance is important to go from a theory of coloniality of gender to the construction of a decolonial feminism; (4) what are the main limitations of Quijano’s concept of “coloniality of gender”; (5) how Eurocentric patriarchy influences the oppressions suffered by non-Eurocentric women; and finally (6) the deep relationship between coloniality of race and coloniality of gender.

Coloniality of Power and Colonial / Modern System of Gender

Modernity (and its inherent coloniality) is designed to create a dichotomy between colonizers and colonized (BALLESTRIN, 2013). Because individuals from the Global North are seen as culturally superior – considering their Eurocentric perspective –, the colonizers supposedly have the right to colonize “inferior” peoples (DUSSEL, 1993). This Eurocentric rational classification is, at its core, a racist classification, established by those who placed themselves at the center of the world and globalized their linear way of thinking as a way of controlling peoples and knowledges (QUIJANO, 2005; WALSH, 2007a).

The coloniality of power is the foundational basis of the coloniality of knowledge, its epistemological dimension and the coloniality of being, its ontological dimension (QUIJANO, 1991). In the Coloniality of Power, the colonizer imposes his idea of development and progress on the colonized, through ideological dichotomies that racially distinguish the colonizer (civilized, advanced) from the colonized (wild, backward) (BALLESTRIN, 2013).

The coloniality of power affects different areas of human life, including *locus* of origin, race, ethnicity, culture, economic dynamics, and gender. The coloniality of power thus represents the hidden/dark side of the modern/colonial gender system, which differentiates Lugones’ work from dominant (and white) feminisms: the focus on colonialism to analyze the oppressions on gender. The coloniality of power forges gender from paradigms that articulate with (and control) ideas of sex, work, race, knowledge, among others. Lugones, therefore, unmask these articulations, making visible “our collaboration with systematic racialized gender violence, so as to come to an inevitable recognition of it in our maps of reality” (LUGONES, 2008, p. 16).

Quijano’s coloniality of power is a central concept in Lugones’ theorization on the coloniality of gender for its discussions on the relations of powers forged by and for modernity, naturalizing relations of inferiority and superiority that directly influences gender relations (LUGONES, 2007). As Tlostanova explains, this global structure of power, called coloniality of power, is manifested, among others, in the control of subjectivity, including of gender (TLOSTANOVA, 2010). And, by adopting the coloniality of power, Lugones seeks not only to explore the modern-colonial historical processes of classification of peoples, but also “the process of active reduction of people, the dehumanization that fits them for the classification, the attempt to turn the colonized into less than human beings” (LUGONES, 2011, p. 75).

Colonial Differences and Colonial Categories of Gender

According to decolonial author Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007), the ontological colonial difference, naturalized by the colonial/modern system, exists to differentiate men from God or other entities, which is closely related to Mignolo’s (2000; 2011) concept on epistemic colonial difference. From the discussions on colonial difference, Walter Mignolo (2000) brings the idea of “border thinking”, a way of thinking from the outside, using alternative knowledge traditions and alternative languages of expression. Lugones also forges a border thinking by developing decolonial feminism, forging a feminist theory that is focused on marginalized and subalternized women, the ones who live outside the margins, in the borders (LUGONES, 1992; 2020b).

Madina Tlostanova (2010) explains that the colonial difference was forged on the gender dimension since the beginning of the colonization process, with the establishment of a colonial imaginary based on the Eurocentric idea of masculinity, and the consequent difference between

European men (superior males) and non-European men (savages, inferior, feminine). Considering further forms of ontological colonial differences, Delgado (2007, p. 199) explains that:

The colonial difference is a notion that stems from the concept of race, an idea created in the 16th century to classify the world's population and define the division of labor; coloniality of power, on the other hand, is a concept that describes the device that produces and reproduces colonial difference beyond ethnic difference [...] In other words, being described as "Indian", "white" or "black" served at first to define the position of the individual within the framework of the social division of labor; the racial / colonial difference was maintained and has continued to be maintained – although rearticulated through other terms and other discourses – thanks to social mechanisms that perpetuate this division.

Modernity thus organizes the world ontologically in terms of atomic, homogeneous, separable categories, including (European) men and (European) women. The colonial "civilizing mission" was represented by the brutal access to people's bodies through exploitation, sexual violation, control of reproduction, and systematic terror, also using hierarchical gender dichotomy as a judgment (LUGONES, 2007; 2010). Gender differences (particularly modern forms of gender differences) were introduced where none existed before: the gender system imposed through colonialism includes the subordination of females in all aspects of life (LUGONES, 2020a).

Resistance: from Coloniality of Gender to Decolonial Feminism

Coloniality and modernity are interdependent, hence the adoption of modern/coloniality expression by various decolonial scholars. Modernity narratively forges itself, a colonial promise of progress and development to peoples that convert to Eurocentric paradigms. The implementation of these paradigms, however, depends on the exclusion and extermination of any difference, resistance, or opposition to modern civilizing projects (WALSH, 2007a; MIGNOLO; WALSH, 2018).

Despite the attempts to silence divergence, colonial domination in the Americas faced, throughout centuries, a series of resistance practices that grew over time. As Catherine Walsh explains, in Latin America, interculturality has its own relevance and meaning, and it is rooted on geopolitics, encompassing place and space, forged on the idea of the Other, "from the historical and current resistance of indigenous and black peoples to their constructions of a social, cultural, and political project, ethical and epistemic oriented to decolonization and transformation" (WALSH, 2007a, p. 47).

For modernity, resistance is a right of whites, a possibility exclusively for the Eurocentric man, who is a true "rational" being. Non-white peoples are ontologically excluded, and, therefore, cannot resist (MALDONADO-TORRES, 2007). Resisting is thus an important part of decolonization but is far from enough. Walter Mignolo explains that resisting needs to be followed by a philosophy of freedom that allows a re-existence, that overcomes the many forms of oppressions imposed on Latin American peoples (MIGNOLO, 2011). María Lugones follows this logic, when she defends that, while the coloniality of gender seeks to analyze racialized, capitalist, gender oppression, the possibility of overcoming it is what she calls decolonial feminism (LUGONES, 2020a). As she explains (LUGONES, 2010, p. 746),

As I move methodologically from women of color feminisms to a decolonial feminism, I think about feminism from and at the grassroots, and from and at the colonial difference, with a strong emphasis on ground, on a historicized, incarnate intersubjectivity. The question of the relation between resistance or resistant response to the coloniality of gender and de-coloniality is being set up here rather than answered. But I do mean to understand resistance to the coloniality of gender from the perspective of the colonial difference.

The imposition of Eurocentric dichotomous hierarchies between white, bourgeois, Christian, heterosexual men and women, transformed gender relations and eventual resistance in their interactions, forging those relations (sexual, social, professional, etc.) on colonial gender differences. Lugones focuses on the colonial differences to critically analyze the coloniality of gender, since discussions on gender are intrinsically related to modernity. As she explains, modernity has historically hampered resistance to the coloniality of gender (LUGONES, 2010).

Quijano's Coloniality of Gender and its Limitations

Since his initial studies, Quijano had already mentioned the issues of the coloniality of power in relation to gender (QUIJANO, 1991), criticizing the Eurocentric patterns of gender sexual behavior and family organization, stressing male sexual freedom, in contrast to the categorization of women, who were either "faithful" (good wives, for instance) or "free" (prostitutes). Quijano particularly criticizes white men's sexual access to women of color (QUIJANO, 2007).

Despite adopting Quijano's coloniality of power as the basis of her decolonial feminist theory, María Lugones (2020) does not consider Quijano's analysis on gender satisfactory to comprehend the full potential of decolonial feminist discussions. The author considers Quijano's

gender analysis reductionist; his discussions, according to her, are limited to the assumption that women are resources, and the exclusively male dispute for the control of sex. In doing so, Lugones believes Quijano reproduces, at least in part, certain (limited) Eurocentric understandings about gender and sex, and decolonial feminism should go beyond such Eurocentric limitations (LUGONES, 2020).

As previously explained, the colonial classification between human and non-human was imposed in favor of white, Eurocentric, bourgeois, heterosexual, Christian men: a truly “rational” being. The white, bourgeois, Eurocentric woman is left with the role of reproducing and serving the white man in a passive way, socially tied to her house (LUGONES, 2010). It is this feminine role that has been discussed by many feminisms, and it is a relevant discussion; however, those feminisms do not include all women, specially not their particular needs, oppressions and challenges (HOLLANDA, 2020).

Therefore, decolonial feminism moves beyond modern/colonial feminisms and claims to overcome the homogeneous categories established ontologically by modernity: decolonial feminism focuses on the intersection that reveals women who were previously absent, oppressed and silenced (LUGONES, 2014). With decolonial feminism, Lugones seeks to highlight colonial categories of women, including in feminist discussions invisible women, who are victimized by the process of gender simplification (LUGONES, 2020a).

Decolonial feminism, therefore, criticizes, questions, and brings to light female issues with a broader, more inclusive field of action, which is not limited to discussions, for example, of neoliberal feminists, whose struggle is focused on (privileged) White women (HOLLANDA, 2020). I do not seek here to question liberal feminism or other dominant feminisms and their respective importance. What I criticize is those feminisms’ insufficiency, and their inability to discuss issues such as systemic racism, violence against women of color and particular social and historical issues in Latin America.

Eurocentric (Heterosexualist) Patriarchy

Eurocentric patriarchy is not only maintained by the current capitalist world; it also establishes the hierarchies of citizenship. The production of (modern-colonial) knowledge reinforces and reproduces such ontological system that creates and imposes colonial differences of gender, and the naturalization of gender violence, especially against marginalized women (TLOSTANOVA, 2010). The patriarchal modern-colonial world-system, as coloniality itself, survived territorial colonization, being re-signified by contemporary global capitalism, and it is still exclusionary, with colonial-modern hierarchies that are naturalized by European patriarchy and its racist, homophobic, and sexist discourses (Santiago CASTRO-GÓMEZ and Ramón GROSFUGUEL, 2007).

In this patriarchal modern-colonial system, European, bourgeois, colonial, heterosexual, Christian man becomes the agent with the leading roles within political, economic, social, religious and sexual contexts, while the bourgeois European woman is limited to the social role of “race” reproducer, and should passively accept her domestic roles in service of her “man”. Such logic is not imposed only in European countries, but also in colonies, regardless of their own realities and social hierarchies (LUGONES, 2010).

Women from various parts of the world are victimized by modern-colonial patriarchy, and many (mainly subaltern and non-privileged women) are also victimized by the State and by the capitalist system, which purportedly ignores the violence imposed on them. These women are not only victimized by the categories that imposed determined roles on Eurocentric women, but also by the limitations imposed on the colonial interpretations (and imposition) of gender (LUGONES, 2020a).

Moreover, as Lugones (2007) highlights, Eurocentric patriarchy is intrinsically linked with heteronormativity, forging a “ahistorical” colonial-modern gender system whose birth is also related to the birth of global capitalism. As the author explains, within the coloniality of gender, power relations between patriarchy, heterosexuality, capitalism, and racial classification cannot be understood separately. In Lugones’ theorization, discussions on heterosexuality focus on the importance of understanding heterosexuality as a modern-colonial normative as well as a perverse part of the violence imposed by the colonial modern gender system, which is tied to “a persistently violent domination that marks the flesh multiply by accessing the bodies of the unfree in differential patterns devised to constitute them as the tortured materiality of power (LUGONES, 2007: 188).

Coloniality of Race and Coloniality of Gender

The colonization of America became the basis for the construction of modernity/coloniality, when colonial differences were framed around the idea of race, helping to establish identities based on skin color. Racial classification divided the world into two groups: white Europeans, the superior and dominant human beings, and non-white peoples from the rest of the world,

the inferior and dominated individuals (BALLESTRIN, 2013). Such process was so injurious that it even impacted the very notion of what was "human". It is important to understand, however, that racial classification, from a decolonial perspective, goes beyond the idea of color; peoples, cultures and knowledges are also classified based on their origins (QUIJANO, 1991; TLOSTANOVA and MIGNOLO, 2012).

As María Lugones (2020a) highlights, decolonial feminism must discuss intersectionality and intersexuality, since dominant discussions of race tend to exclude female issues, just as dominant gender discussions tend to exclude women of color. The main difference here between Lugones' theorization on the power relations between race and gender and the theories of intersectional feminists is that Lugones centers her discussions on coloniality. As Lugones (2011) defends, race and gender were formed in inseparable colonial processes and, therefore, should be discussed within the Eurocentric patriarchy logic as racialization of procreation. (LUGONES, 2011; 2020a). In Lugones' words

the racialized, gendered self is multiple in its perceiving others perceiving her as inferior, as lacking in the fundamental capacities of the rational modern self. Her inferiority to others' superiority is inscribed not just in how she is perceived but also in the very complex construction of the social world. Her construction as inferior is fictional but real because the fiction is upheld by power.

On this subject, the works of Lélia Gonzalez, an Afro-Brazilian feminist, can contribute to decolonial discussions (Claudia CARDOSO, 2014; HOLLANDA, 2020). She proposed the co-creation of Afro-Latin American feminisms, which would not exclude any feminism, but would make the movement more plural, including the discussion of the deep and historical racial inequalities in the region, particularly for women (GONZALEZ, 2020). Gonzalez is a pioneer in the criticism of structural racism in Brazil, denouncing the (colonial) condition of Afro-Brazilian women, while fighting against the military dictatorship in the country (Alex RATTIS and Flavia RIOS, 2014).

She also pioneered in the criticism of hegemonic feminisms, centering her reflection on black and indigenous women in Brazil, Latin America, and the Caribbean. According to Claudia Cardoso (2014), Lélia Gonzalez introduced the proposition of a construction of a decolonial knowledge, in order to resist dominant paradigms and to forge new ones, that reflect the realities of those women of color. Gonzalez also discusses how racial hierarchies are maintained in Latin America by a "masked" or "disguised" racism, which prevents an objective awareness of racism itself (GONZALEZ, 1988).

Decolonial feminism

As Lugones says in one of her essays, "the decolonial feminist's task begins by [...] seeing the colonial difference, emphatically resisting [the] epistemological habit of erasing it" (Lugones 2010, p. 753). One of the main contributions in María Lugones' works is precisely her gender and heterosexualist patriarchy discussions in a field mainly dominated by heterosexual men, as Emma Velez and Nancy Tuana explain. Therefore, it is essential to understand the "contributions of Latin American and Latinx feminist philosophies to the development of the rich weave of decolonial philosophies" (VELEZ and TUANA, 2020, p. 67).

María Lugones' decolonial feminism represents her interest in theorizing possible horizons in which subaltern and silenced women can resist and overcome intersecting systems of oppression. She highlights women who resisted the colonial-modern system of gender since colonization, especially Native Americans and Africans, and how their descendants resist until today (SCHUTTE, 2020). With her theory of decolonial feminism, María Lugones expands forms of colonial thinking, of resisting and re-existing from the border, with gender being analyzed from modern categorizations and paradigms, "in the living intersectionality in which identities and power relations are founded" (Alejandro VALLEGA, 2020, p. 61).

The decolonial feminist movement, therefore, must be freed from hegemonic and separable categories between gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic and geopolitical issues, since the coloniality of gender cuts across diverse issues, in the economic, political, social, religious, and knowledge fields, among others (LUGONES, 2010). And, as Lugones herself explains, many of the points she highlights are also developed by other feminist theories (LUGONES, 2020a, p. 54):

We have important works on gender, race, and colonization that constitute the feminisms of women of color in the United States, the feminisms of women in the Third World, and the feminist versions of the Lat Crit and Critical Race Theory schools of jurisprudence. These analytical frameworks emphasize the concept of intersectionality and demonstrate the historical and theoretical-practical exclusion of non-white women in the libertarian struggles waged in the name of women (LUGONES, 2020a, p. 54).¹

¹ Translated from the Portuguese version to preserve accuracy.

In the following subsections, I will explore four influences on Lugones' theory on decolonial feminism, including (1) Julie Greenberg's criticisms on binary categorization; (2) Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí's research on non-gender equality; (3) Paula Gunn Allen's theories on gynocentric equality; and finally (4) Michael Horswell's discussions on the third gender and homosexuality.

These authors present gender understandings that are beyond modern-colonial gender categories and, therefore, can be adopted as the basis for the construction of decolonial feminisms with different forms of existence. However, it is worth mentioning that some of these authors are quite controversial. For instance, Paula Gun Allen has been accused of being essentialist and reducing diversity among indigenous peoples (Craig WOMACK, 2008). Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí has also received various critiques because of her famous book "The Invention of Women", raging from her methodological approach, the articulation of her categories on gender, to her theoretical framework (Wanderson NASCIMENTO, 2019).

Lugones adopts these authors' theories to propose possible epistemological and ontological horizons that move beyond the limitations created by the modern-colonial gender system. Therefore, she presents non-binary categorizations, gynocentric equality, non-gender equality, third gender and homosexuality as forms of existence that do not exist in the modern-colonial gender system but might be paths to take to decolonize this system and exist outside colonial paradigms of gender.

Julie Greenberg: non-Binary Categorization

Julie Greenberg (2002), a law professor expert on the legal issues relating to gender, sex, sexual identity and sexual orientation, explains that, while race classification systems have been the subject of extensive critique and research for decades, sex and gender classification systems became the topic of extensive scholarly discussion only in the end of the twentieth century. In her work, Greenberg highlights the two main paths for sex and gender classification in the justice system: one can either accept the traditional binary sex classification system, which excludes millions of people, or instead move towards a deconstruction of the binary sex and gender categories. She claims that the second approach would be more effective in protecting those who are not classified in the simplistic binary categorization, abolishing arbitrary characteristics to define males and females (GREENBERG, 2002).

In the last few years, Julie Greenberg has been particularly highlighting how binary sex and gender classifications can be hurtful to children. In 2020, she wrote a paper with two colleagues critically analyzing the practice of unnecessary cosmetic surgeries on infants with intersex traits, arguing that many experts defend a delay of these procedures, since "no comprehensive studies show that they result in a psychological benefit, much less a benefit that outweighs the reported physical and emotional risks" (Katherine DALKE *et al.*, 2020, p. 207). In another paper, she further criticizes such practice stating that these procedures violate fundamental human rights when they happen before the person can give informed consent (GREENBERG, 2017).

Greenberg often (and critically) discusses the naturalization of the conversion of intersex individuals into the binary categories recognized by modern-colonial gender system: male or female (LUGONES, 2020a). Intersexuality is not protected – or recognized by the law: while an individual might self-identify their sex in certain (and limited) documents, in the majority of situations legal systems design sex based on the traditional binary categories (GREENBERG, 2002).

According to Lugones (2020a), while sexual dimorphism is part of the visible side of modern-colonial gender system, intersex individuals are located on the dark side of this system, even though intersex individuals were recognized in many tribal societies prior to colonization. Colonization thus brought sex and gender concepts that changed social organizations in various ways, with gender having meanings being forged before "biological traits", since intersex people were not cosmetically "fixed" / "corrected" in all traditions, particularly before colonization. Therefore, "considering critically both biological dimorphism and the position that gender socially constructs biological sex is pivotal to understand the scope, depth, and characteristics of the colonial/modern gender system" (LUGONES, 2008, p. 12).

Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí: Non-Gender Equality

Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí is a Nigerian (with Yorubá origins) sociology professor, who researches from an African perspective, highlighting Western simplistic paradigms and concepts. Focusing on her ancestral culture, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí would write her most known work in 1997 - "The Invention of Women" (OYẸWÙMÍ, 2017), in which she explores the meaning of gender in an African context, stating that the understanding of "woman" is a Western concept, not adequate for viewing (and understanding) African society.

Colonial control is often described as male, heterosexual, and privileged, in which the male colonizer takes away the colonized (male)'s manhood. However, as Oyěwùmí explains, the colonized were not as (sexually) homogenic as the colonizers' narrative implies. Modern-colonial

history is focused on the male perspective, ignoring women's participation, even though colonization impacted both men and women. The author argues that, from the beginning of the colonial process, colonized women were excluded from state structures, which was (OYĚWŪMÍ, 2017, p. 213):

in sharp contrast to the state organization Yorùbá, in which **power was not determined by gender**. The isolation of women from state structures was particularly devastating because the very nature of the state was undergoing a transformation. Unlike the Yorùbá state, the colonial state was despotic. The African males appointed as chiefs by the colonizers had much more power over the people than was traditionally conferred upon them.

Oyěwùmí thus questions the cross-cultural category validity of patriarchy itself, since Yorubá society did not consider gender as a principle to organize itself before the colonization. Therefore, patriarchy is a Eurocentric construct that is not natural or even universal. Western domination not only imposes its interpretation of culture, economy, and knowledge, but also of gender, and the exclusion of women from the political life in societies such as Yoruba facilitated colonizers' control on the globe. Gender, therefore, is an essential device of dominance, producing hierarchies even where there was none (LUGONES, 2020a).

Paula Gunn Allen: Gynocentric Equality

Like Oyěwùmí (2017), Paula Gunn Allen uses her ancestors' culture and principles to exemplify how colonizers used Eurocentric patriarchy to control women and their roles in society, along with gender itself and its meanings (MENDOZA *et al.*, 2021). Paula Gunn Allen is a Native American poet, professor, and novelist, who is of European-American, Native American, and Arab-American descent (ALLEN, 1992).

In the case of many Native American societies (one of which she descends from), Allen explains that colonization: (1) overthrew feminine "gods" and "spiritual" leaderships, imposing their own masculine god; (2) destroyed tribal institutions and philosophical principles; (3) expelled entire groups from their lands, thus removing them from not only their system, but also taking away their livelihoods; (4) substituted gynocentric systems with patriarchal systems, in which female leaders are replaced by male figures who are, in many cases, chosen by the colonizers themselves (LUGONES, 2020a).

According to Allen (1992), before the colonization, traditional Native American tribes were more often gynocentric, their systems focused on social responsibility, not on hierarchies that privilege small groups of "leaders". The fear of gynocentric systems, Allen argues, are one of the most important reason for colonizers to physically and culturally destroy Native American societies; Christian missionaries were intolerant to groups that "allowed" their political-cultural-social leadership to be female, and "empresses attending parleys with colonizers and being treated with deference by male leaders did not sit well with the invaders" (Allen, 1992, p. 18).

Therefore, the domination of Native American societies is closely related to the eradication of gynocracy, with the interiorization of indigenous women and their social-cultural-political roles in their respective tribes. Afterwards, colonizers re-historicized and re-interpreted American Native tribal principals, values, and knowledges, incorporating the idea of patriarchy as a "natural" form of organization (ALLEN, 1992; MENDOZA *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, those societies did not interpret gender from simplistic biological terms; instead, individuals were designated tribal gender based on other principles, such as temperament, or even dreams (LUGONES, 2020a).

Michael Horswell: Third Gender and Homosexuality

According to Michael J. Horswell (2005), third-gendered subjects were vital individuals in Andean ceremonies, many times with the role of assisting in the mediation of dialogues between tribal leaders and communities. These third-gendered (men-women) shamans performed rituals that eventually required two people from the same sex to perform erotic tasks, and their third-gendered attire was a representation of a (third) space between masculine and feminine. However, these third-gender figures were presented by Spanish colonizers and scholars as diabolical and deviant (HORSWELL, 2005).

However, as Horswell highlights, the existence of a third gender in Andean cultures does not mean three separate genders, but a path to overcome binary sex and gender; the third gender, thus, emblematically represents other possible combinations in addition to dimorphism (LUGONES, 2020a). The third gender is an androgynous force beyond Eurocentric gender paradigms and challenges male hierarchies of power, transcending biology and sexual orientation and mediating absolute opposites (WALSH, 2018).

Just like the third gender, homosexuality was also classified as deviant by the colonizers, and later re-interpreted according to "European 'ethnographic imagination,' beginning in 1750," which "initiated a linking of male-to-male sexual practices to cross-gender identity that ultimately led to the European construction of the effeminate homosexual as a distinct identity" (HORSWELL, 2005, p. 168). Horswell (2005) also researched how sodomy was adopted, including in ritual

practices, in various Andean and Native American societies. However, the Spanish colonizers condemned active participation in sodomy, considering it a sin, even though the passive participant was interestingly not penalized. As Lugones (2008, p. 11) explains, “in Spanish popular culture, sodomy was racialized by connecting the practice to the Moors and the passive partner was condemned and seen as equal to a Moor”.

As previously stated, these theories might help the research that seeks the decolonization of gender, through various paths that encourage us to search and forge an existence free from pre-conceived, colonial, and limited ideas on gender. Most of these discussions were presented by Lugones in her 2020 chapter (2020a). Unfortunately, the author passed away in July of that same year, so she was unable to further discuss how and if she would develop these theories with her own lenses of feminism or if she would incorporate even more forms of living outside the modern-colonial gender system. Either way, her contributions are vital to decolonial thought, particularly coloniality of gender and decolonial feminism.

Final Considerations: Future Horizons (?)

María Lugones' theory is important both for Latin American feminist discussions and particularly for the decolonial perspective. Historically, mainstream feminisms have excluded subaltern women through a universalist discourse, further marginalizing women from the Global South, women of color, poor women, homosexual women, among many others. Additionally, within the decolonial perspective, gender discussions were scarce and, as Lugones has shown, sometimes even replicating Eurocentric paradigms of gender.

Therefore, her work's contributions are vast and deserve our attention. And I would like to suggest some themes / subjects in Lugones' work that should be further analyzed and discussed, especially related to the two phases of her trajectory. For instance, as Lugones moves towards a more institutionalized “theory” (the decolonial perspective), it is noticeable that she practically abandons certain influences and discussions.

For instance, Gloria Anzaldúa, who is said to be a great influence for her (LUGONES, 1992), practically disappears from her work in the second phase of her trajectory (mid-2000s onward). Also, as Ofelia Schutte (2020) defends, Lugones' decolonial feminism helped widen the “decolonial gates” and should, therefore, go beyond the field's framework. In other words, we should not allow decolonialism to limit Lugones' thoughts and contributions. As Schutte explains (and questions), “Lugones's use of Quijano's world systems theory leads to an overdetermining historical approach that disables the spirit of inquiry for diversely situated Latinas, even as the theory itself invokes the heterogeneity of their experiences” (SCHUTTE, 2020, p. 102).

Another theme that deserves attention is the matter of methodology in Lugones' decolonial feminism. Shireen Roshanravan, for instance, highlights the challenges of “María Lugones's coalitional imperative of decolonial feminism as it requires sustaining painful confrontations for acting in complicity with the very oppressions the aspiring decolonial feminist may have believed herself to be entirely against” (ROSHANRAVAN, 2020, p. 119). The author explains that decolonial feminists might focus on mastery of radical performance instead of moving towards self-transformation, because of the coalitional crossings necessary for Lugones's decolonial feminist methodology.

Another example in methodological approaches for Lugones' decolonial feminism can be found within Critical Discourse Analysis. Some scholars, such as Viviane Vieira, have been researching decolonial feminist perspectives in discourse analysis. Vieira's efforts is on how to forge decolonial studies on discourse specifically in cases that involve gender-sexuality issues. In order to do that, the scholar has been attempting to adapt some of CDA's tools to use in gender-sexuality studies (VIEIRA, 2019).

However, adopting discourse analysis with a decolonial approach has its own challenges. Scholars in favor of such an approach recognize the colonialities that exist within this methodology (e.g.: Mariana ACHUGAR, 2021; Yuana AHMED, 2021). On the one hand, a decolonial approach in discourse analysis could mean the introduction of a form of thinking and researching that can be understood by anyone who comes from any place of speech, which would mean a “simplification” of the analysis (Viviane RESENDE, 2017). On the other hand, Laura Pardo (2019) warns that the lack of methodological rigor can also be problematic.

I just mentioned here three aspects of Lugones' work and contributions that could (and should) be further explored. I hope more Latin American scholars might adopt and discuss Lugones' decolonial feminism in the future.

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