

Indigenous Movements and decolonial feminism

By Maria Lugones

Two ideas have always been central in my thinking. I have centered resistance to multiple oppressions understood historically and located in very different places, habitats that share the brutal dehumanization of being conceived, imagined, treated, trained, and legalized as subhuman, as inferior by nature. My understanding of reality as multiple is inseparable from the centering of resistance, since to center resistance to oppression necessitates that reality doubles, that it unfolds, since in the world of domination one animates a subhuman being and in the world in which one is capable of rejecting that imposition, one is a person among others who treat and conceive one as such. Both worlds are powerfully real, the first world is structured institutionally, economically, politically, socially, legally centrally with the separation of human beings into superior and inferior by nature. The world of resistance is institutionally weaker but it is spirited in a long winded way. Oppressions are multiple but neither separate nor separable in thought or in the world. The logic of modernity features categories, dichotomies, and logical oppositions of the A and not A sort. Reality is organized in terms of dichotomous categories in relations of opposition: Mind/body, public/private, reason/emotions, men/women, white/black. Each term of any oppositional dichotomy stands in an evaluative relation to the other: one is superior to the other, more important, and the less valuable makes the existence of the more valuable possible. The oppositional

dichotomizing hides the violence of oppression as it hides the intersection of categories through rendering the social world into impermeable, homogenous, complete categories of people in relation and as it hides the power that needs to be deployed to maintain the oppositional dichotomizing. As people are conceived, classified and treated in terms of homogenous categories, each group is rendered from the inside. Those who are categorially not homogenous, are disappeared. Indigenous and black women are disappeared. Though in categorial dichotomizing race and gender intersect or interlock, in the world of those resisting oppression, they fuse or intermesh inseparably. Thinking specifically of women of color, intersectionality marks their erasure from the social, but women of color live resistantly in a social world that finds them inseparably racialized. Women and black are treated as separate categories by the racialized gendered state, but women multiply as do blacks since both are not homogenous categories. Women of color is a coalitional term meant to include women of the African diaspora, indigenous women of AbyaYala, Indo-Caribbean women, Chino-Cuban women and other racialized women. Abya Yala is the name that the Kuna of Panama gave to the territory named America by the Colonizers. Abya Yala has been adopted by the indigenous movements as their territory.

The second idea centers coalition against multiple oppressions. The most important feature of colonial intrusion is the violent attempt to destroy the communities of those who became colonized and to fragment them as separate and closed to each other. To break down

and overcome that attempt to fragment and separate all communities, groups, nations, peoples, pueblos through coalitions that understand them as permeable is the decolonial project that moves me intellectually and politically. The permeability of nations-- the counter to the colonial conception of the colonized as property and as beings that have no internal coherence or government—means that each nation flows out in the world and renders other nations and communities impure and are rendered impure by other communities in turn, communities that cohere or are dispersed. Coalition is a radical deepening of that permeability through learning others' ways of living, their spiritual and social relations and longings, their knowledges, their economies, their ecologies towards liberation. It is a moving together defying colonial cartographies, seeking autonomy from the nation state, enriching the communal senses of self, designing practices of self-government that place all members at the place of deliberation and decision making and accord each the power to participate. These are some of the ingredients that constitute indigenous and afrodescending pueblos and communities as historical projects in some of the most significant movements of our time. In the movements, coalition requires interculturality, multilinguality, indigenous and Afro universities like Amauta Wasi, reciprocity in commerce that acknowledges the diversity of skills in producing life and the enormous diversity of fruits, grains, animals, vegetables that the habitats provide with human care.

There are 301 indigenous peoples in Brazil, 35 indigenous peoples in Argentina, 36 indigenous peoples in Bolivia, 9 indigenous peoples in Chile, 26 indigenous peoples in Venezuela, 102 indigenous peoples in Colombia, 26 indigenous peoples in Ecuador, 51 indigenous peoples in Peru

There are 150 million People of African descent in South America: Afro-Colombians, Afro-Surinamese, Afro-Venezuelans, Afro-Argentinians, Afro-Bolivians, Afro-Peruvians, Afro-Ecuadorian, Afro-Brazilian.

All indigenous peoples and people of African descent are under the coloniality of power, the coloniality of gender, of knowledge, of language, of being.

COLONIALITY

The Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano understands that all power is structured in relations of domination, exploitation and conflict. What is characteristic of global, Eurocentered, capitalist power is that it is organized around two axes that Quijano terms, “the coloniality of power” and “modernity.” The coloniality of power introduces the basic and universal social classification of the population of the planet in terms of the idea of “race.” The invention of “race” is a pivotal turn as it replaces the relations of superiority and inferiority established through domination, it re-conceives humanity and human relations fictionally, in biological terms. A conception of humanity was consolidated according to which the world’s population

was differentiated in two groups: superior and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern. "Primitive" referred to a prior time in the history of the species, in terms of evolutionary time. In constituting this social classification, coloniality permeates all aspects of social existence and gives rise to new social and geocultural identities. "America" and "Europe" are among the new geocultural identities. "European," "Indian," "African" are among the "racial" identities. This classification is "the deepest and most enduring expression of colonial domination." With the expansion of European colonialism, the classification was imposed on the population of the planet. Since then, it has permeated every area of social existence and it constitutes the most effective form of material and inter-subjective social domination. Thus, "coloniality" does not just refer to "racial" classification. It is an encompassing phenomenon, since it is one of the axes of the system of power and as such it permeates all control of sexual access, collective authority, labor, subjectivity/inter-subjectivity and the production of knowledge from within these inter-subjective relations. Quijano also makes clear that, though coloniality is related to colonialism, these are distinct as the latter does not necessarily include racist relations of power. Coloniality's birth and its prolonged and deep extension throughout the planet is tightly related to colonialism. In Quijano's model of global capitalist Eurocentered power, "capitalism" refers to the structural articulation of all historically known forms of control of labor or exploitation, slavery, servitude, small independent mercantile

production, wage labor, and reciprocity under the hegemony of the capital-wage labor relation.” In this sense, the structuring of the disputes over control of labor are discontinuous: not all labor relations under global, Eurocentered capitalism fall under the capital/wage relation model, though this is the hegemonic model. Wage labor has been reserved almost exclusively for white Europeans. The division of labor is thoroughly "racialized" as well as geographically differentiated. Here we see the coloniality of labor as a thorough meshing of labor and “race.”

In characterizing modernity, Quijano focuses on the production of a way of knowing, labeled rational, arising from *within this subjective universe* since the XVII century in the main hegemonic centers of this world system of power (Holland and England). This way of knowing is Eurocentered .By “Eurocentrism” Quijano understands the cognitive perspective not of Europeans only, but of the Eurocentered world, of those educated under the hegemony of world capitalism. “Eurocentrism naturalizes the experience of people within this model of power.” The cognitive needs of capitalism and the naturalizing of the identities and relations of coloniality and of the geocultural distribution of world capitalist power have guided the production of this way of knowing. The cognitive needs of capitalism include “measurement, quantification, externalization (or objectification) of what is knowable with respect to the knower so as to control the relations among people and nature and among them with respect to it, in particular the property in means of production.” This way of

knowing was imposed on the whole of the capitalist world as the only valid rationality and as emblematic of modernity.

Europe was mythologically understood to pre-exist this pattern of power as a world capitalist center that colonized the rest of the world and as such the most advanced moment in the linear, unidirectional, continuous path of the species. Europe came to be mythically conceived as preexisting colonial, global, capitalism and as having achieved a very advanced level in the continuous, linear, unidirectional path. It is from within this mythical starting point that other human inhabitants of the planet came to be mythically conceived not as dominated through conquest, nor as inferior in terms of wealth or political power, but as an anterior stage in the history of the species, in this unidirectional path. That is the meaning of the qualification "primitive."

We can see then the structural fit of the elements constituting Eurocentered, global capitalism in Quijano's model (pattern). Modernity and coloniality afford a complex understanding of the organization of labor. They enable us to see the fit between the thorough racialization of the division of labor and the production of knowledge. The pattern allows for heterogeneity and discontinuity. Quijano argues that the structure is not a closed totality.

Gender is constituted by and it constitutes the coloniality of power. There is no gender/race separability in Quijano's model.

COLONIALITY OF GENDER

By “coloniality of gender” I mean the gender system that flows from the dichotomizing of the human and the non-human. The dichotomizing of the human and the non-human is the central dichotomy of colonial capitalist modernity. With colonial modernity, beginning with the colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean, the gender distinction, the hierarchical dichotomous distinction between men and women became characteristically human and a mark of civilization. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species time, primitive, and came to be viewed as animals, as monstrously sexual, wild. As the colonized are animals, they are not human, and as they are not human, they lack gender, one of the characteristics of humanity. The European bourgeois man is a subject, fit for rule, for the public, a being of civilization, heterosexual, Christian, a being of mind and reason. The European bourgeois woman is not his complement, but the one who reproduces race and capital through her sexual purity, passivity, home-boundedness. Being gendered in this dichotomous manner, makes being a man a mark of humanity. Women are human in their relation to white bourgeois, European men.¹ The hierarchical dichotomy as a mark of the human becomes also a normative tool to damn the colonized. The colonized’s behavior and their personalities/souls are judged as bestial and thus non gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, sinful. They are also differentiated as males and females. Though at this time the understanding of sex

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was not dimorphic, animals were differentiated as males and females, the male being the perfection, the female, the inversion, deformation of the male. ² Hermafrodites, sodomites, viragos were all understood to be aberrations from male perfection. The sexual difference in the modern colonial gender system is not the ground of gender, since the sexual difference in the colonized cannot be socialized as gender.

The colonial 'civilizing mission' was the euphemistic mask of brutal access to peoples' bodies through unimaginable exploitation, violent sexual violation, control of reproduction, systematic terror (feeding people alive to dogs, making pouches and hats from the vaginas of brutally killed indigenous females, for example.) The civilizing mission used the hierarchical gender dichotomy as a judgment, though the attainment of dichotomous gendering was not the point of the normative judgment. Turning the colonized into human beings was not a colonial goal. Christian confession, sin, the Manichean division between good and evil served to imprint female sexuality with evil. Though the colonized were not to become human, the civilizing mission justified the erasure of people's senses of self, of intersubjective relation, the colonization of memory, the destruction of community, of people's relation to the spirit world, to the land, to the very fabric of one's conception of reality, identity, social, ecological, cosmological organization as all were seen as marks of animality, or of demonic possession. The normativity that tied gender and civilization, was used emphatically in the erasure of community, of ecological

practices, of knowledges of planting, of weaving, of the cosmos, and not only in changing and controlling reproductive and sexual practices. One can begin to appreciate the tie between the colonial introduction of the instrumental modern concept of nature central to capitalism and the colonial introduction of the modern concept of gender and appreciate it as macabre and as heavy in its impressive ramifications.

DECOLONIALITY OF GENDER

The semantic consequence of the coloniality of gender is that 'colonized woman' is an empty category. No women are colonized. No colonized females are women. Thinking at the coloniality of gender is to think of historical beings only one-sidedly since they are only understood as oppressed, passive, empty, pliable. Not even the coloniality of gender as process is well understood is well understood on its own, since it is inseparable from resistance. Thus the suggestion is not that we see these beings from an other side to the eurocentered construction of gender in indigenous organizations of the social. Rather we are following the historical enactment of the oppressing \leftrightarrow resisting relation. That relation is constituted by the tense, brutal, meeting of eurocentered colonial modern and the constitution of the colonized as guarani, ona, toba, kuna, quechua, tojolabal, nahua. That relation is ever changing and not reducible to a linear understanding of one side of an equation. Thus resisting is a response backed by collective, shared and always being made anew meaning. The response to the Eurocentered coloniality of gender is in

a different logic to the coloniality, and thus not reducible to it.

Oppressing \leftrightarrow resisting as cotemporaneous, logically distinct and contradictory is the relation within which the history of the indigenous and Afrodiasporic people has been and continues to be complexly woven. Unlike colonization, the coloniality of gender is with us, it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race/sexuality as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power. The coloniality is not enacted on passive beings.

When I think of myself as a theorist of resistance that is not because I think of resistance as the end or goal of political struggle, but rather its beginning, its possibility. I am interested in the relational subjective/intersubjective spring of liberation, as both adaptive and creatively oppositional. Resistance is the tension between subjectification (the forming/informing of the subject) and active subjectivity, that minimal sense of agency required for the oppressing \leftrightarrow resisting relation being an active one, without appeal to the maximal sense of agency of the modern subject.

Decolonizing gender is necessarily a praxical task. It is to enact a critique of racialized, colonial, capitalist heterosexualist gender oppression as a lived transformation of the social. As such it does place the theorizer in the midst of people in a historical, peopled, subjective/intersubjective understanding of the oppressing \leftrightarrow resisting relation at the intersection of complex systems of oppression. To a significant extent it has to be in accord, in tune, with the subjectivities and intersubjectivities that partly construct and in

part are constructed by ‘the situation.’ It must include “learning” peoples. Furthermore, a feminism does not just provide an account of the oppression of women. It goes beyond oppression by providing materials that enable women to understand their situation without succumbing to it. Here I begin to provide a way of understanding the oppression of women who have been subalternized through the combined processes of racialization, colonization, capitalist exploitation, and heterosexualism. My intent is to focus on the subjective-intersubjective to reveal that disaggregating oppressions disaggregate the subjective-intersubjective springs of colonized women’s agency. I call the analysis of racialized capitalist gender oppression “the coloniality of gender.” I call the possibility of overcoming the coloniality of gender “decolonial feminism.”

The coloniality of gender enables me to understand the oppressive imposition as a complex interaction of capital, race, gender in which every person at the colonial encounter can be found, as a live, historical, fully described being. It is as such that I want to understand the resistor as being oppressed, the colonizing construction of the fractured locus. But the coloniality of gender hides the resistor as fully informed as a native of communities under cataclysmic attack. So, the coloniality of gender is only one active ingredient in the resisters history. In focusing on the resistor at the colonial difference I mean to unveil what is obscured.

The long process of coloniality begins subjectively and intersubjectively in a tense encounter that both forms and will not

simply yield to capitalist modern colonial normativity. The crucial point about the encounter is that the subjective and intersubjective construction of it informs the resistance offered to the ingredients of colonial domination. The global capitalist colonial modern system of power that Anibal Quijano characterizes as beginning in the 16th century in the Americas and enduring till today met not a world to be formed, of empty minds, evolving animals. It rather encountered complex cultural, political, economic, religious beings: selves in complex relations to the cosmos, to others selves, to generation, to the earth, to living beings, to the inorganic, in production; selves whose erotic, aesthetic, linguistic expressivity, whose knowledges, senses of space, longings, practices, institutions, forms of government were not to be simply replaced but met, understood, entered into in crossings and dialogues and negotiations which never happened. Instead the process of colonization invented the colonized and attempted a full reduction of them to both less than human primitives, satanically possessed, infantile, aggressively sexual, in need of transformation. The process I want to follow is the oppressing \leftrightarrow resisting process at the fractured locus of the colonial difference. That is, I want to follow subjects in intersubjective collaboration and conflict, fully informed as members of native American societies, as they take up, respond, resist, accommodate to hostile invaders who mean to dispossess and dehumanize them. The invasive presence engages them brutally, in a prepossessing, arrogant, incommunicative and powerful ways leaving little room for

adjustments that preserve their own senses of selves in community and in the world. But, instead of thinking of the global capitalist colonial system as in every way successful in its destruction of peoples, knowledges, relations, economies, I want to think of the process as continually resisted. And thus I want to think of the colonized neither as simply imagined and constructed by the colonizer and the coloniality in accordance with the colonial imagination and the strictures of the capitalist colonial venture, but as a being who begins to inhabit a fractured locus constructed doubly, perceiving doubly, relating, doubly, where the “sides” of the locus are in tension, in conflict and the conflict itself, its energy, moves, actively informs the subjectivity of the colonized self in multiple relation.³

A central consequence of what I called here ‘the coloniality of gender’ and which elsewhere I have proposed as the ‘modern/colonial gender system is that gender is a modern colonial imposition. The modern colonial gender system is not just hierarchical but racially differentiated, and the racial differentiation denies humanity and thus gender to the colonized.⁴

The long process of subjectification of the colonized towards adoption/internalization of the men/women dichotomy as a normative construction of the social, a mark of civilization, citizenship, membership in civil society was and is constantly renewed. It is met in the flesh over and over by oppositional responses grounded in a long

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history of in the flesh oppositional responses and lived as sensical in alternative, resistant socialities at the colonial difference. It is movement towards coalition that impels us to know each other as selves that are thick, in relation, in alternative socialities, grounded in tense, creative inhabitations of the colonial difference.

As I am investigating historically and in contemporary living, concrete, lived, resistances to the coloniality of gender that issue from this tension. In particular, I want to mark the need to keep a multiple reading of the resistant self in relation. This is a consequence of the colonial imposition of gender. We see the gender dichotomy operating normatively in the construction of the social and in the processes of subjectification. But we need to bracket the gender distinction in understanding resistance and the sources of resistance rather than reading it into the very fabric that constitutes the self in relation resisting. Only then can we appreciate the different logic that organizes the social in the resistant response. Thus the multiple perception and inhabitation, the fracture of the locus, the double or multiple consciousness is constituted, in part, by this logical difference. The fractured locus includes the hierarchical dichotomy that constitutes the subjectification of the colonized. But the locus is fractured by the resistant presence, the activity subjectivity of the colonized against the colonial invasion of self in community from the inhabitation of that self. We see here the mirroring of the multiplicity of the Woman of Color in Women of Color feminisms.

In the methodology of decoloniality, I also propose a move to read the social from the cosmologies that inform it, rather than beginning with a gendered reading of cosmologies informing, constituting perception, motility, embodiment, relation. The reading I propose moves in a very different direction than reading gender into the social. The shift can enable us to understand the organization of the social in terms that unveil the deep disruption of the gender imposition in the self in relation. Translating terms like *koshskalaka*, *chachawarmi*, *urin* into the vocabulary of gender, into the dichotomous, heterosexual, racialized, hierarchical conception that gives meaning to the gender distinction, is to exercise the coloniality of language through colonial translation.

I want to emphasize that I am not advocating not reading, or not ‘seeing’ the imposition of the dichotomy in the construction of every day life, as if that were possible. To do so would be to hide the coloniality of gender and it would erase the very possibility of sensing, reading, the tense inhabitation of the colonial difference and the responses from it.

COALITION

Instead of starting from my own peopled ground, I want to start *coalitionally*, following selves in relation inhabiting the tension of the colonial difference from socialities to which I am and from those to which I am not an insider, learning other resisters at the colonial

difference.⁵ The reading moves against the social scientific objectifying read, attempting rather to understand subjects, the active subjectivity emphasized as the read looks for the fractured locus in resistance to the colonality of gender, at a coalitional starting point. In think of the starting point as coalitional because the fractured locus is in common, though the histories of resistance at the colonial difference is that in which we need to *dwell*, learning each other. The colonality of gender is sensed as concrete, intricately related exercises of power, some body to body, some legal, some inside a room as indigenous female-beasts-not-civilized-women are forced to weave day and night, others at the confessional. The differences in the concreteness and intricacy of power in circulation are not understood as levels of generality—embodied subjectivity and the institutional are equally concrete.

As the colonality infiltrates every aspect of living through the circulation of power at the levels of the body, labor, law, imposition of tribute, introduction of property and land dispossession, its logic and efficacy are being met by different concrete people whose bodies,

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selves in relation, relations to the spirit world are not following the logical of capital. The logic they are following is not countenanced by the logic of power. The movement of these bodies and relations does not repeat itself. It does not become static and ossified. Everything and everyone continues to respond to power and responds much of the time resistantly—which is not to say in open defiance, though some of time there is open defiance-- in ways that may or may not be beneficial to capital, but which are not in its logic. From the fractured locus the movement succeeds in retaining creatively ways of thinking, of behaving, of relating that are anti-thetical to the logic of capital. Subject, relations, ground, possibilities are continually transformed incarnating a weave from the fractured locus, that constitutes a creative peopled re-creation. Adaptation, rejection, adoption, ignoring, integrating are never just modes in isolation of resistance as they are always performed by an active subject thickly constructed by inhabiting the colonial difference with a fractured locus. I want to see the multiplicity in the fracture of the locus: both the enactment of the coloniality of gender and the resistant response from a subaltern sense of self, of the social, of the self-in-relation, of the cosmos, all

grounded in a peopled memory. Without the tense multiplicity we only see either the coloniality of gender as accomplishment, or a freezing of memory, an ossified understanding of self in relation from a precolonial sense of the social. Part of what I see is tense movement, people moving: the tension between the dehumanization and paralysis of the coloniality of being, and the creative activity of be-ing.

Finally, I mark here the interest in an ethics of coalition in the making in terms of be-ing, and be-ing in relation that extends and interweaves its peopled ground. (Lorde, *Sister Outsider*) I can think of the self in relation as responding to the coloniality of gender at the colonial difference from a fractured locus, backed by an alternative communal source of sense that makes possible elaborate responses. The direction of the possibility of strengthening the affirmation and possibility of self in relation lies not through a rethinking from the point of the oppressed of the relation with the oppressor, but through a furthering of the logic of difference and multiplicity and of coalition at the point of difference. The emphasis is on maintaining multiplicity at the point of reduction, not in maintaining a hybridity (as a product,

which hides the colonial difference) but in the tense workings of more than one logic, not to be synthesized but transcended . Among the logics at work are the many logics meeting the logic of oppression, many colonial differences, but one logic of oppression. *The responses from the fragmented loci can be creatively in coalition.* A way of thinking of the possibility of coalition that takes up the logic of decoloniality, and the logic of coalition of feminists of color: the oppositional consciousness of a social erotics that take on the differences that make be-ing creative, that permits enactments that are thoroughly defiant of the logic of dichotomies. The logic of coalition is defiant of the logic of dichotomies, differences are never seen in dichotomous terms, but the logic has as its opposition the logic of power. The multiplicity is never reduced.