

# Coloniality and Modern Patriarchy

## Expansion of the State Front, Modernization, and the Lives of Women<sup>1</sup>

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### Duality and Binarism—Verisimilitudes between the ‘Egalitarian’ Gender of Coloniality/Modernity and its Hierarchical Counterpart of the Pre-Intrusion Order

I will refer here to a specific form of infiltration, that of the gender relations of the modern colonial order in the village-world [*mundo-aldea*]. It is of the utmost importance to understand that, in comparing the intrusive process of the colony and, later, of the republican state in the other worlds, with the order of coloniality/modernity and its citizen precept, we not only illuminate the village-world. Also, and above all, we gain access to dimensions of the republic

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and of the paths of law that are generally opaque to us. Rendered invisible by the system of beliefs – civic, republican – in which we are immersed, that is, by the civic religiosity of our world. I would also like to note that the analysis of what differentiates the gender of one world from the other reveals with great clarity the contrast between their respective patterns of life in general, in all spheres, and not only in the sphere of gender. This is because gender relations are, despite their typification as a ‘particular subject’ in sociological and anthropological discourse, a pervasive and omnipresent scene of all life.

I propose, therefore, to read the interface between the pre-intrusion world and colonial modernity based on the transformations of the gender system. That is, it is not merely a matter of introducing gender as one of the themes of decolonial critique, or as one of the aspects of domination in the pattern of coloniality, but to give it a real theoretical and epistemic status by examining it as a central category capable of illuminating all the other aspects of the transformation that are imposed on the lives of communities as they were captured by the new modern colonial order.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Author’s note for this publication: The modelling I present here of the historical process brought about by the transition from what I have called the ‘village-world’ [*mundoidaldea*] – for lack of a better name to represent the social relations before the colonial intrusion, the world into which the colonial administration intervened, first from overseas and then as a republic – is the result of a ten-year period of observation of the expansion of the ‘democratic’ state front in the indigenous world of Brazil. The ‘democratic’ state front to which I refer is that of the post-dictatorships in our countries, which reaches to the indigenous frontier, to the ‘village-world’, with laws and public policies, companies and NGOs. This front, always colonial, irremediably intrusive and intervening in what remains of the village-world tries to deliver with one hand what it has already withdrawn with the other, it strives to offer antidotes, in the form of rights, to contain the action of the poison it has already inoculated. Due to the constitutive format of the state and the low awareness among its agents of the difference between ‘citizenship’ as a mass of formally rights-bearing individuals and a communitarian and collectivist organization of life, its actions have an almost inevitably disruptive impact on the web of relationships and system of authority of the village-world and of the memory of its members. I have seen this process unfold, expand, and affect the lives of women, and this is what I speak about in this text. The foundational event of that nearly decade-long period of participation and observation began in 2002, when I was summoned by the Fundación Nacional del Indio – FUNAI – to conduct a seminar-workshop with the aim of creating a lexicon to construct a discourse capable of capturing and transferring the demand for policies of indigenous women to the Brazilian state on the eve of the PT [Brazilian Workers Party] and President Lula’s ascension to the presidency of the nation.

This topic, it seems to me, is of course part of a very recent debate, and, in order to situate it, it is appropriate to identify three positions within feminist thought: Eurocentric feminism, which affirms that the problem of gender domination, of patriarchal domination, is universal, with no major differences, justifying under this banner of unity the possibility of transmitting modernity's advances in the field of rights to non-White, indigenous and Black women of the colonized continents. It thus sustains a position of moral superiority of European or Eurocentric women, authorizing them to intervene with their civilizing-colonial/modernizing mission. This position is, in turn, inevitably a-historical and anti-historical, because it encloses history within the very slow, almost stagnant time crystal of patriarchy, and above all occludes the radical twist introduced by the entry of colonial/modern time into the history of gender relations. As I mentioned earlier, both race and gender, despite having been installed by epistemic ruptures that have established new eras – that of coloniality for race, and that of the species for gender – make history within the stability of the episteme from which they originate.

A second position, at the other extreme, is the position of some authors, such as María Lugones and also Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, who affirm the non-existence of gender in the pre-colonial world (Lugones 2007). I published, in 2003 (2003a), a critical analysis of Oyèrónkẹ's 1997 book, in the light of a text of mine from 1986 which expressed the same perplexity about gender in the atmosphere [*atmósfera*] of the Yoruba civilization, but with divergent conclusions.<sup>3</sup>

### **Indigenous and Afro-American Societies as 'Low-intensity' Patriarchies**

And a third position, represented by me here, is supported by a large accumulation of historical evidence and ethnographic accounts that incontrovertibly show the existence of gender nomenclatures in tribal and Afro-American societies. This third strand identifies in indigenous and Afro-American societies a patriarchal organization, albeit different from that of Western gender, which could be described as a low-intensity patriarchy, and does not consider the leadership of Eurocentric feminism to be either effective or opportune. In this

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3 Segato (1986, 2005 [1986]).

group, we can mention the feminist thinkers linked to the Chiapas process,<sup>4</sup> which constituted a paradigmatic positioning to resolve the tensions arising from women being embedded in the double predicament of indigenous struggles and the internal struggle for better living conditions for their gender.<sup>5</sup>

Women – both indigenous and African American –<sup>6</sup> whose actions and thoughts are divided between, on the one hand, loyalty to their communities and peoples on the external front and, on the other, their internal struggle against the oppression they suffer from within their communities and peoples, have frequently denounced the blackmailing of indigenous authorities, who pressure them to defer their demands as women lest they end up fragmenting the cohesion of their communities, making them more vulnerable to the struggle for resources and rights. This has been contested by the authors I quote.

Documentary, historical, and ethnographic data from the tribal world show the existence of recognizable structures of difference, similar to what we call gender relations in modernity. These contain clear hierarchies of prestige between masculinity and femininity, represented by figures that can be understood as men and women. Despite the recognizable character of gender positions, in this world, there are more frequent openings for transit and circulation between these positions that are forbidden in their modern Western equivalent. As is well known, indigenous peoples, such as the Warao of Venezuela, the Cuna of Panama, the Guayaquíes [*Aché*] of Paraguay, the Trio of Surinam, the Javaés of Brazil, and the pre-Columbian Inca world, among others, as well as a number of Native American peoples in the United States and Canadian First Nations, as well as all African-American religious groups, include transgender languages and contemplate transgender practices, marriages between people whom the West would view as being of the same

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4 Refers to the 1994 Zapatista (Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Spanish: *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*; EZLN)) uprising and ensuing tension between the Mexican state and the indigenous communities and subsistence farmers of the Mexican region of Chiapas from the 1990s to the present day. Negotiations between the government and Zapatistas led to agreements being signed, but were often not complied with in the following years as the peace process stagnated leading to an increasing division between communities with ties to the government and communities that sympathized with the Zapatistas. Note by the translator.

5 See, for example: Cutiérrez/Palomo 1999; Hernández Castillo 2003; and Hernández/Sierra 2005.

6 See, for example: Williams/Pierce 1996.

sex, and other gender transivities that have been blocked by the absolutely unbending gender system of coloniality/modernity.<sup>7</sup>

Dimensions of constructing masculinity that have accompanied humankind throughout its entire history are also recognizable in the pre-intrusion world, in what I have called “the patriarchal pre-history of humanity” characterized by a very slow temporality, that is to say, of a *longue-durée* that is confused with evolutionary time (Segato 2003b). This masculinity is the construction of a subject obliged to acquire it as a status, going through trials and facing death as in the Hegelian allegory of the lord and his servant. This subject is burdened by the imperative of having to conduct and reconduct himself to it throughout his life under the gaze and evaluation of his peers, proving and reconfirming abilities of resistance, aggressiveness, domination, and the accumulation of what I have called ‘feminine tribute’ (Segato 2003b), in order to exhibit the package of powers – warlike, political, sexual, intellectual, economic and moral – that will allow him to be recognized and labeled as a masculine subject.

On the one hand, this indicates that gender does exist, albeit in a different form than in modernity. And on the other hand, it shows that when this colonial modernity approaches the gender of the village, it modifies it dangerously. It intervenes in the structure of village relations, capturing them, and reorganizing them from within, maintaining the appearance of continuity, but transforming meanings by introducing an order that is now governed by different rules. That is why I speak of verisimilitude: The nomenclatures remain, but they are reinterpreted in the light of the new modern order.<sup>8</sup> This crossover is truly fatal, because a language that was once hierarchical, in contact with the egalitarian discourse of modernity, is transformed into a super hierarchical and [uprooted] order, due to the factors that I will examine below: the super-inflation of men in the community environment, in their role as intermediaries with the outside world, that is to say, with the emasculation of the men outside of their community in the face of the power of the White administrators; the super-inflation and universalization of the public sphere, ancestrally inhabited by men, with the collapse and privatization of the domestic sphere; and the binarization of duality, resulting from universalizing one of its two terms

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7 For a list of transgender identities in historical and contemporary societies, see Camuzano (2009a: 76).

8 Author’s note for this publication: Something similar has been pointed out by Julieta Paredes (2010) with her idea of the ‘Interlocking Patriarchies’ [Entroque Patriarcal].

by constituting it as public, in opposition to the other, which is constituted as private.

### **Totalitarianism of the Public Sphere and the Domesticization of Women**

If the village has always been organized by status, divided into well-characterized spaces with their own rules with differential prestige and hierarchical order, inhabited by people destined for them who can be, in a very generic way, recognized from a modern perspective as men and women because of their roles proper to those spaces, and who are marked by this destiny of spatial, labor, ritual distribution; the discourse of coloniality/modernity, although egalitarian, hides within it, as many feminist authors have already pointed out, an abysmal hierarchical hiatus, due to what we could tentatively call the progressive totalization of the public sphere or 'totalitarianism of the public sphere'. It might even be possible to suggest that it is the public sphere that today continues and deepens the colonizing process.<sup>9</sup>

I illustrate this with an example of what happens when we arrive in the villages with the workshops of the Women's Committee of the FUNAI<sup>10</sup> to talk to indigenous women about the growing problems of violence against them, the news of which reaches Brasilia. What is happening, in general, but especially in areas where life that is considered 'traditional' is supposedly more preserved and where autonomy from the state is valued more highly, as in the case of the inhabitants of the Xingu Park, in Mato Grosso, is that the caciques and the men are present and interpose the argument that there is nothing for the state to discuss with their women. They support the argument with the plausible truth that their world "has always been like this": "The control we have over our women is a control we have always had over them". They support this statement, as I anticipated on the previous pages, with a culturalist, and therefore fundamentalist, argument, in that it presupposes that culture had no history.

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9 Author's note for this publication: If we use the category 'sexual contract' coined by Carole Pateman (1988), we illuminate this idea by affirming that in the village-world, the sexual contract is exposed, while in colonial modernity, the sexual contract is disguised by the language of the citizen contract.

10 Translator's note: FUNAI stands for Fundação Nacional del Indio (National Indian Foundation) which is located in Brazil.

Arlette Gautier calls this historical myopia “the invention of customary law” (Gautier 2005: 697).

The answer, rather complex by the way, that we give them, is: “Partly yes, and partly no”. Because, if there was always a hierarchy in the village-world, a prestige differential between men and women, there was also a difference, which is now threatened by the encroachment and colonization of the public republican space, which propagates a discourse of equality and relegates difference to a marginal, problematic position – the problem of the ‘other’, or relegating the other to a ‘problem’ status. This inflection, introduced by way of annexation under the aegis, first, of the overseas-based colonial administration, and, later, of the colonial/state administration, as the first of its symptoms, coopts men as the class ancestrally predestined to the tasks and roles of the public space due to characteristics they held pre-intrusion.

Ancestrally, it has been the men’s domain to deliberate on the village commons, to go on hunting expeditions, and make contact with other villages, near or far, of their own or other peoples, to parley or go to war with them. This is why, from the perspective of the village, the agencies of the successive colonial administrations are part of this register: with whom one parleys, with whom one fights wars, with whom one negotiates, with whom one makes pacts and, in recent times, from whom one obtains resources and rights (considered as resources) that are claimed in times of identity politics. The ancestral male position, therefore, is now transformed by this relational role with powerful agencies that produce and reproduce coloniality. It is with men that the colonizers fought wars and negotiated, and it is with men that the state of coloniality/modernity does the same things now. For Arlette Gautier, the choice of men as privileged interlocutors was deliberate and functional to the interests of colonization and to the efficacy of its control: “Colonization brings with it a radical loss of women’s political power, where it existed, while the colonizers negotiated with certain masculine structures or invented them, in order to gain allies” (2005: 718) and promoted the ‘domestication’ of women and their greater distance and subjection to facilitate the colonial enterprise (ibid: 690).<sup>11</sup>

The masculine position is thus inflected and promoted to a new and distanced platform that hides behind the preceding nomenclature, now strengthened by privileged access to resources and knowledge about the world of power. It is thus inadvertently dislocated, while the order is being ruptured and reconstituted, maintaining the old names and rituals of gender, but endowing

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11 Author’s note for this publication: On this subject, see also Assis Climaco (2009).

the position with new contents. Men return to the village claiming to be what they have always been but concealing the fact that they are already operating in a new way. We could also speak here of the famous and permanently fertile metaphor of *body-snatching* from the Hollywood classic *The invasion of the body snatchers*; the ‘perfect crime’ formulated by Baudrillard, because it is effectively hidden in the false analogy, or verisimilitude. We see the gender cast playing out another drama; we see a new grammar applied to its vocabulary.

### The Administrative and Pornographic Colonial Gaze

Women and the village itself now became part of an objective externality for the male gaze, infected, by contact and mimesis, of the evil of distance and exteriority which is inherent to the exercise of power in the world of coloniality. The position of men now became simultaneously interior and exterior, with the exteriority and objectifying capacity of the simultaneously administrative and pornographic colonial gaze. In a very synthetic way, on which I cannot expand here, I anticipate that sexuality is transformed, introducing a previously unknown morality, one which reduces women’s bodies to objects and, at the same time, inoculates the notion of sin, nefarious crimes, and all that it entails. We must attribute to coloniality/modern exteriority – the exteriority of scientific rationality, administrative exteriority, expurgatory exteriority of the other and of the difference already pointed out by Aníbal Quijano (1992) and by Walter Mignolo (2003 [2000]: 290–291, 424) in their texts – that pornographic character of the colonizing gaze.

It should be noted that, along with this hyperinflation of the male position in the village, they are also being emasculated when they are confronted with the White world, which puts them under stress and shows them the relativity of their masculine position by subjecting them to the sovereign dominion of the colonizer. This process is *violentogenic* [violentogénico], as it oppresses them here while empowering them in the village, forcing them to reproduce and exhibit the capacity of control inherent to the male subject position in the only world that is now possible, to restore damaged virility on the external front. This is true for the entire universe of racialized masculinity, relegated to the condition of non-Whiteness by the order of coloniality.

The hijacking of all politics, that is to say, of all deliberation about the common good, by the nascent and expansive republican public sphere, and the consequent privatization of the domestic space, its *othering* [otrificación],



marginalization, and expropriation of everything that was a political task in it, also forms part of this panorama of pre-intrusion gender getting captured by modern gender. The exclusive ties between women, which were geared towards reciprocity and solidarity, both in rituals and in productive and reproductive tasks, are diluted in the process of encapsulating domesticity as 'private life'. For the domestic space and those who inhabit it, this means nothing more and nothing less than a crumbling of their political value and power, that is, of their capacity to participate in the decisions that affect the whole collectivity. The consequences of this rupture of bonds between women – and of the end of the political alliances that these bonds had enabled and encouraged for the women and their causes – were literally fatal for their security. Thus, they became progressively more vulnerable to male violence, in addition to the stress caused by the pressure put on men from the outside world.

The compulsive restriction of the domestic space and of women as its inhabitants to a private refuge has terrible consequences in terms of the violence that victimizes them. It is essential to understand that these consequences are *fully modern and a product of modernity, remembering that the ever-expanding process of modernization is also an ongoing process of colonization*. Likewise, the characteristics of the crime of genocide, due to their rationality and systematicity, originated in modern times, and feminicides, as almost machinic practices of extermination of women, are also a modern invention. It is the barbarism of colonial modernity mentioned above. As I have argued elsewhere, its impunity is linked to the privatization of the domestic space as a residual space that is excluded from the sphere of major issues, which are considered to be of general public interest (Segato 2010). With the emergence of the modern universal grid, from which emanate the state, politics, rights, and science, both the domestic sphere and the women who inhabit it are transformed into mere remnants, on the margins of issues considered of universal relevance and neutral perspective.

### **Gender as a Hierarchical Duality in the *Mallkus*, vs. Modern Binarisms**

Although in the public space of the village-world of a large number of Amazonian and Gran Chaco communities, there are precise restrictions on women's participation and speech, and the prerogative of deliberation is reserved for

men, it is a well-known practice that these men adjourn their session in the tribal agora at sunset, in many cases in a very ritualized manner, without arriving at any conclusion, in order to hold a consultation in the evening in the domestic space. The parliament only resumes the next day, with the contribution from the women's world, who only speak in the house. Skipping this consultation incurs a severe penalty for men. This is common and occurs in a clearly compartmentalized world where, although there is a public space and a domestic space, politics, as a set of deliberations that lead to decisions that affect collective life, cuts across both spaces. In the Andean world, the authority of the *mallkus*<sup>12</sup>, although its internal order is hierarchical, is always dual, involving a male head and a female head. And all community deliberations are accompanied by women, seated next to their husbands, or gathered outside the enclosure where they take place, and they signal their approval or disapproval over the course of the debate. This way, there is no monopoly of politics over the public space and its activities, as in the modern colonial world. On the contrary, the domestic space is endowed with politicization, because it is a space of obligatory consultation and because it is where the women's body corporate is articulated as a political front.

Gender, thus regulated, constitutes a hierarchical duality, in which both terms that compose it, despite their inequality, are ontologically and politically complete. In the world of modernity, there is no duality, there is binarism. While in duality, the relation is one of complementarity, the binary relation is one of supplementarity; one side supplements – and does not complement – the other. When one of these terms becomes 'universal', that is to say, of general representativeness, what was once a hierarchy becomes an abyss, and the second term becomes a mere remnant<sup>13</sup>: This is the binary structure, which is different from the dual.

According to the modern colonial and binary pattern, any element, in order to attain ontological completeness, completeness of being, must be equalized, that is to say, it must be made commensurable based on a frame of reference or universal equivalent. This produces the effect that any manifestation of otherness will constitute a problem, and will only cease to do so when

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12 *Mallku*: leader in Aymara ("leader", "prince"). The institution of the *Council of Mallkus and Amautas* acts like an upper house of the indigenous parliament of the Andes region. Note by the translator.

13 "*Resto*" in the original: rest, remainder. Note by the translator.

sifted through the equalizing grid, neutralized of particularities, of idiosyncrasies. The other-Indian, the other-non-White, the woman, unless they are either purged of their difference, or their difference is made commensurable as a recognizable identity within the global pattern, do not neatly fit into this neutral, aseptic environment of the universal equivalent that can be generalized and attributed with universal value and interest. In the world of modernity, individual and collective subjects and issues will only acquire politicization and be endowed with political capacity if they can, in some way, be processed, reconverted, transported, and reformulated so as to be expressed in universal terms in the 'neutral' space of the republican subject, where the universal citizen subject speaks. All that is left over in this processing, that which cannot be converted or made commensurable within that grid, is a mere remnant.

However, as other authors have already affirmed, only one native subject can traverse this sphere, this modern agora, naturally because he has emerged from this very space. And this subject, who has formulated the rule of citizenship according to his own image and likeness, because he based it in an exteriority that took shape in this initially belligerent and then immediately ideological process that installed the colonial and modern episteme, has the following characteristics: He is male, White, *pater-familiae* – therefore, at least functionally, heterosexual –, proprietor, and literate. Anyone who wants to mimic his civic capacity will have to reconvert to this profile, by means of politicization – in the sense of 'publicization of identity', since the public is the only thing that has political power in the modern environment.<sup>14</sup>

## Gender Dualism vs. Western Individualization and Heteronormativity

'Dualism', as in the case of gender dualism in the indigenous world, as one of the variants of the multiple or the two 'sums-up' [*el dos resume*], epitomizes a multiplicity.<sup>15</sup> *Binarism*, being proper to coloniality/modernity, results from the episteme of the expurgation and constructed exteriority, of the world of

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14 For this discussion see Warner (1990); West (2000 [1988]); Benhabib (2006 [1992]); Cornell (2001 [1998]).

15 Author's note for this publication: This multiplicity originated in the transitions between the two poles; the crossings, encounters and crossroads of the many forms of transgenderedness in the worlds in which there was no, or only partial intervention by the structure of coloniality.

the One. The one and the two of indigenous duality are one among many possibilities of the multiple, where the one and the two, though they may function complementarily, are ontologically complete and endowed with politicization, though unequal in value and prestige. The second in this hierarchical duality is not a problem that demands conversion, or being funneled through the grid of a universal equivalent, nor is it a mere remnant of the transposition to the One, but it is fully other, a complete, irreducible other.

By understanding this, we understand that the domestic is a complete space with its own politics, with its own associations, hierarchically inferior to the public, but with the capacity for self-defense and self-transformation. One could say that the gender relationships in this world configure a patriarchy of low intensity, if compared to the patriarchal relations imposed by the colony and stabilized in modern coloniality.

Without going into detail, I draw attention here to the well-known failure of the gender strategies of prestigious international cooperation programs, precisely because they apply a universalist view and start from a Eurocentric definition of 'gender' and the relations it organizes. In other words, the great fragility of collaboration on this matter is due to the fact that it lacks sensitivity to the categories specific to the contexts for which the projects are formulated. In rural communities and indigenous villages, society is dual in terms of gender, and this duality organizes spaces, tasks, and the distribution of rights and duties. This duality defines gender communities or collectives. Therefore, the general community fabric is, in turn, subdivided into two groups, with their internal norms and their own forms of coexistence and association for productive and reproductive tasks as well as ceremonial tasks. In general, the technical cooperation projects and actions of European countries reveal the difficulty of perceiving gender specificity in the community environments in which they operate. As a consequence, projects and actions related to gender and aimed at promoting gender equality are referred to and applied to people, i.e., individual women, or the relationship between women and male individuals, and the result pursued is the direct and unmediated promotion of gender equality conceived as equality of persons and not of spheres. Designed with a focus on individuals, actions to promote gender equity do not take into account that actions sensitive to the community context should be aimed at promoting the domestic sphere and the women's collective as a whole, as opposed to the hierarchy of prestige and power of the public community space and men's collective. Indeed, the goal of the projects should be to promote equality between the men's collectives and the women's collectives within the communi-

ties. Only this equality can result, subsequently, in the emergence of outstanding women's personalities who do not distance themselves from their communities of origin, i.e., who permanently return to and practice permanent action together with their group.

In addition to [the aforementioned] individualism inherent in the perspective of the state and state and trans-state programs, the modern world is the world of the 'one', and all forms of otherness in relation to the universal pattern represented by this 'one' constitute a problem. The discipline of anthropology itself is proof of this, for it was born out of the modern conviction that the others have to be explained, translated, made commensurable, processed by the rational operation that incorporates them into the universal grid. Anything that cannot be reduced to it remains as a residue that has no weight in reality, is not ontologically full, is incomplete and irrelevant waste material. Derridean deconstruction, which destabilizes the binary duo, has no place or role to play in the circuit of duality.

With the transformation of dualism, as a variant of the multiple, into the binarism of the 'one' – universal, canonical, 'neutral' – and its other – remnant, residue, anomaly, margin – transitions are closed down, as is the option to circulate between the positions, all of which become colonized by binary logic. Gender is cast, in the Western way, in the heterosexual matrix, and the rights of protection against homophobia and policies to promote equality and sexual freedom, such as same-sex marriage, prohibited in colonial/modern times and accepted in a wide diversity of indigenous peoples of the continent, become necessary.<sup>16</sup>

The pressures imposed by the colonizer on the diverse forms of sexuality that he found in the Inca empire have been reported by Giuseppe Campuzano (2006, 2009, among others) in chronicles and documents of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In these texts, the pressure exerted by the norms and the punitive threats introduced to confine those practices to the conquistador's binary heterosexual matrix imposes notions of sin which were foreign to the world encountered here, and propagates its pornographic gaze. This allows us to conclude that many of the moral prejudices that are perceived today as belonging to 'custom' or 'tradition', those that the instrument of human rights tries to combat, are in fact prejudices, customs, and traditions that are already modern, that is, originating from the pattern installed by colonial modernity. In

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16 I described this difference between the worlds for the Afro-Brazilian religious communities of the Nagô Yoruba of Recife in the article cited above (1986).

other words, the supposedly homophobic 'custom' as well as others, is already modern. And, once again, we find ourselves with the legal antidote that modernity produces to counteract the problems that it itself introduced and continues to propagate.

This rigid casting into positions of identity is also one of the characteristics of racialization, installed by the colonial/modern process, which forces subjects into fixed positions within the binary canon here constituted by the terms White/non-White.<sup>17</sup>

Sadly, the redistribution of the cosmos and the whole earth with all its beings, animate and inanimate, to fit into the binarism of the subject-object relationship of Western science is also part of this process. In the midst of this new situation – new and progressive for many peoples exposed to a permanent and daily process of conquest and colonization –, the struggles for rights and equity-oriented public policies are characteristic of the modern world. And it is not a matter of opposing them, but of understanding to which paradigm they belong and, especially, to understand that to live in a decolonial way is to try to open breaches in a territory totalized by the binary system, which is possibly the most efficient instrument of power.

That is why, when I hold workshops at FUNAI's Working Group on Gender and Generation to present the advances of the *Maria da Penha Law* against Domestic Violence, I tell my indigenous women participants that the state is giving them with one hand what it has already taken from them with the other.

## Coloniality as the Depoliticization of the Domestic Space

When the world of the one and the rest, in the binary structure, encounters the world of the multiple, it captures and modifies it from within itself as a consequence of the coloniality of power, which allows for a greater influence of one world over another. It would be more accurate to say that it colonizes it. In this new dominant order, the public space, in turn, comes to capture and monopolize all deliberations and decisions regarding the general common good, and the domestic space as such becomes depoliticized, both because it loses its ancestral forms of intervention in the decisions that were made in the public

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17 On the co-emergence of colony, modernity, and capitalism with the categories 'Europe', 'America', 'race', 'Indian', 'White', 'Black' see Quijano (1991, 2000) and Quijano/Wallerstein (1992).

space, and also because it is enclosed in the nuclear family and locked in privacy. New imperative forms of conjugality and censorship of the extended ties that once crossed domesticity are becoming the norm (Maia 2010/Abu-Lughod 2002), thus weakening the control exercised by the community gaze, monitoring and judging the community's behavior. The depoliticization of the domestic space makes it vulnerable and fragile, and there are countless testimonies of the degrees and cruel forms of victimization that occur when the protection of the community's gaze on the family world disappears. The authority, value, and prestige of women and their sphere of action crumble.

This critique of the fall of the domestic sphere and of the women's world, from a position of ontological completeness to the level of a remnant or residue of the real, has important gnoseological<sup>18</sup> consequences. Among them is the difficulty we face when, though we do understand the omnipresence of gender relations in social life, we do not manage to view our entire reality from the point of view of gender, giving it a theoretical and epistemic status as a central category capable of illuminating all aspects of social life. In contrast, in the pre-intrusion world, this problem of the gnoseological devaluation of the gender system does not exist, as evidenced by the constant references to duality in all its symbolic fields.

What is most important to note here is that, in this context of change, nomenclatures are preserved and a mirage, a false impression of continuity of the old order occurs, with a system of names, formalities, and rituals that apparently remains, but is now governed by another structure.<sup>19</sup> This passage is subtle, and the lack of clarity about the changes that have occurred causes women to submit without knowing how to answer the men's repeated refrain of "we have always been this way", and their claim to be maintaining a custom that they assume or affirm to be traditional, with the hierarchy of value and prestige that is proper to it. This keeps women in a permanent state of being blackmailed, threatened with the assumption that if they touch and modify this order, it would harm their people's identity, as political capital, and culture, as symbolic capital and reference in the struggles for continuity as a people, thus weakening demands for territories, resources, and rights as resources.

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18 Gnoseological: Considering the theory of knowledge, note by the translator.

19 I analyzed this in my book of 2007: *La Nación y sus otros. Raza, etnicidades y diversidad religiosa en tiempos de Políticas de la Identidad*, Buenos Aires: Prometeo.

What has happened, however, and what I have been saying, is that the hierarchical distance and power of those who already had power – elders, chiefs, men in general – has been aggravated internally, within the village space, as a consequence of modern colonization. As I have stated, although one can say that there has always been hierarchy and gender relations as relations of unequal power and prestige, with the colonial state intervention and the entry into the colonial/modern order, this oppressive distance has been aggravated and magnified. A mutation occurs under the mantle of apparent continuity. Therefore, it takes rhetorical skill to convey that the effect of historical depth is an optical illusion to solidify the new forms of authority of men and other hierarchies of the village. For here, we are faced with a perverse culturalism, of which I spoke at the beginning of this essay, which is nothing other than the fundamentalism of the political culture of our times, inaugurated with the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the obsolescence of the Marxist debate, when identities, now politicized, became the language of disputes (Segato 2007).

### **Ethnic and Communitarian Citizenship: “Unequal *but* Different”**

To sum up, and to recapitulate: When we think that we are replacing the hierarchy that used to order the relationship between men and women with an egalitarian relationship, in a gesture that aims at universalizing citizenship, what we are really doing is remedy problems that modernity itself introduced with solutions that are also modern: The state delivers with one hand what it has already withdrawn with the other. Unlike the “different but equal” formula of modern activism, the indigenous world is guided by the formula, difficult for us to access, of “unequal *but* different”. That means that it is truly multiple, because the other, which is different, or even inferior, does not represent a problem to be solved. The imperative of commensurability disappears. It is here that the interworld of critical modernity enters taking advantage of pre-intrusion structures for its own benefit, fertilizing the ethnic hierarchy with its discourse of equality, and generating what some are beginning to call ethnic or communitarian citizenship, which can only be adequate if it is based on internal debate and proper jurisdiction, that is, from the debate and deliberation of its members, weaving together the threads of their particular history. I conclude by referring here to the extraordinary film *Mooladé*, by the recently deceased Senegalese director Ousman Sembene, about the struggle of a group



of women in a village in Burkina Faso to eradicate the practice of infibulation<sup>20</sup>: From the inside, the internal face of the community, which is, as it has always been, intersected by the surrounding world.

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