

Question: *How does Maria Lugones' approach to the coloniality of gender reframe the question of coloniality? And what are some implications her approach offers for decolonising and other liberatory practices?*

In her articles "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (2007) and "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" (2010), Maria Lugones reframes Quijano's (2007) idea of the "coloniality of power" by introducing gender and other categories into the system. This enables the conceptualisation of a more radical idea of the living experience of colonised peoples and reveals a multiplicity of potential modes of subjectivation, which arise at sites where non-modern philosophies, social orders, and practices resist erasure in meeting with the imposition of colonial structures. This has powerful implications for decolonisation and other liberatory practices.

Lugones' arguments draw upon Quijano's idea of the coloniality of power. Quijano's theory outlines how the category of race, thought as an unquestioned scientific truth, has been applied to entire colonised populations. For Quijano, race is imposed as though it were a universal knowledge, but is, in actuality, a "a blatantly ideological construct," (2007 p.47). It has nothing to do with human biology but is an instrument of Eurocentred colonial power. Its imposition leads to the oppression and destruction of Indigenous peoples' philosophies and methods of knowing, doing, and being, and replaces them with the coloniser's systems. Quijano asserts that race is "the most efficient instrument produced in the last 500 years," (p.45). It exerts its control through "the four basic areas of human existence: sex, labor, collective authority and subjectivity/intersubjectivity, their resources and products," (Quijano, cited in Lugones 2007 p.190).

Lugones accepts these tenets of Quijano's system but reframes the idea of the coloniality of power by emphasising gender, which she believes is overlooked in his theory. For Lugones, Quijano "accepts the global, Eurocentred, capitalist understanding of what gender is about," (2007, p.190). She also rejects his assertion of the dimorphic position that

“[s]ex is not a construct in the way that gender is,” (Quijano 2007 p.51). In Lugones’ schema, the concept of biological sex is equally an imposition of an alien concept on a colonised culture. Her aim is to

expand and complicate Quijano’s approach, while preserving his understanding of the coloniality of power, which is at the center of what I am calling the modern/colonial gender system (p.190).

Thus, Lugones argues for the need to bring gender into the centre of the understanding of colonial domination. She claims that gender was introduced into coloniality as a way to conquer and have power over civilizations, their ways of knowing, of being, and their understanding of the workings of the universe. She proposes that gender is not a universal benign categorisation of the species, but a colonially imposed system of the control of bodies. Lugones proposes a

rereading of modern capitalist colonial modernity itself...because the colonial imposition of gender cuts across questions of ecology, economics, government, relations with the spirit world, and knowledge (2010, p.742).

Lugones calls “the analysis of racialized, capitalist, gender oppression “the coloniality of gender,” and the possibility to overcome it, “decolonial feminism,” (p.748). She asserts that feminism is a model to talk about oppression without succumbing to it. Lugones’ approach is necessarily, fundamentally intersectional, because coloniality is a complex epistemological violence. An intersectional approach is needed so that coloniality can be understood and resisted, and also enables the conception of interlocking oppressions and their dynamics and power relations in order to make visible the specificities of experiences of colonised peoples. For Lugones, “race is no more mythical and fictional than gender. Both are powerful fictions,” (2007, p.203). By recognising

gender as a fundamental defining category of western ontology, cosmology, and epistemology, Lugones can reveal the effect of its imposition on fundamentally different cosmologies, ontologies, and epistemologies.

She backs this up by referring to studies concerning non-modern social systems that existed prior to colonisation, which endure in some form among colonised peoples, and are structured according to fundamentally different basic philosophical categories. She draws on the work of Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997), and Paula Gunn Allen (1986/1992), which uncover ontologies, cosmologies, and social structures that existed prior to colonisation. In her accounts of the Yoruba peoples of West Africa, Oyěwùmí claims that "gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization by the West," (Oyěwùmí, cited in Lugones 2007, p.196). The introduction of gender into Yoruba society excluded women from traditional power structures, in "sharp contrast to Yoruba state organization, in which power was not gender-determined," (ibid). In unquestioningly taking gender for granted as a fundamental category, colonial scholars are not only blinded to nuances of other ways of being, but are actually reproducing the colonial structures. Oyěwùmí says European "researchers always find gender when they look for it," (ibid). According to Lugones, Gunn Allen's depiction of Native American societies, emphasises

the centrality of the spiritual in all aspects of Indian life and thus a very different intersubjectivity from within which knowledge is produced than that of the colonality of knowledge in modernity (p.199).

Gunn Allen says the "gynecratic spiritual plurality" of Native American tribes was replaced by a patriarchal and hierarchical colonial system. These accounts by Oyěwùmí and Gunn Allen are examples of complex

social arrangements that existed prior to colonisation. As pointed out by Quijano (2007), intersubjectivity is a determining force in subjectivity, so as these social arrangements are replaced by Western systems, certain types of personhood are either completely or partially excluded by coloniality. The imposition of Western models of gender, biological sex, and race on the roles and categories of different bodies and different sexual practices and understandings underpinning the distinctive philosophies of different cultures can be understood as a kind of cosmological, philosophical, cultural, epistemological genocide.

Lugones points out that this is doubly devastating for those who become recognised in coloniality as women of colour as a result of the imposition of both race and gender. She notes that while Quijano's theory shows

aspects of the intersection of race and gender, it follows rather than discloses the erasure of colonized women from most areas of social life. It accommodates rather than disrupts the narrowing of gender domination (2007, p.199).

This is the key to Lugones' innovation. It is "only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of colour," (p.193). In colonised peoples, the imposition of gender along with race frames those who are recognised as men by the Western gender system, although rendered inferior by racialisation, as superior to those who are recognised as women in the imposed scheme. The repercussions and implications of this remain in the dominant power structures of postcolonial societies. The effects can be seen in current day situations such as the morality police in Iran enforcing state control of women's bodies, and obdurate misogyny in parts of African American hip-hop culture. However, most tellingly, Lugones' recognition of the need to consider gender also reveals liberatory possibilities.

The introduction of Mignolo's (2000) concept of the "colonial difference" and her own concept of the fractured locus (2010) allows Lugones a further profound reframing of Quijano's coloniality of power, and a consequent more complex, nuanced, and radical conceptualisation of the living experience of colonised peoples. This leads to the revealing of multiplicities of what she characterises as potential modes of "resistant subjectivity," (p.147).

Following Mignolo, Lugones is careful to avoid narrowly defining the colonial difference, but to keep its meanings "open ended," (2010, p.752). The colonial difference is "the space where coloniality of power is enacted," (Mignolo cited in Lugones, p.752). Lugones asserts that beginning with the colonial difference, and speaking from it, enables the possibility of seeing from the point of view of the colonised, those "dehumanized beings," (p.752). At the colonial difference, the universalising colonial ways of thinking, knowing, and being give way to an understanding in which the two systems are figured as an encounter between two different local histories. This gives rise to a new kind of thinking, which Mignolo, borrowing from Anzaldúa, characterises as a "border thinking," which offers new possibilities for resistance, rejection, reappropriation and alternative subjectivities.

Lugones develops this further with the concept of "the fractured locus" (2010), where the coloniser and the colonised meet. It is an adaptive negotiation which occurs "always concretely, from within," (p.754). At this disjuncture, other modes of social organisation and philosophies, such as those outlined by Oyěwùmí and Gunn Allen, are lived simultaneously with the violences of coloniality. At this fractured locus of the colonial difference, these complex, non-Western relations to self, others, environment, and external forces meet with the imposed colonised way of

life, allowing an explosive multiplicity of subjectivating possibilities, and more radical liberatory ways of thinking that are not restricted by gender dichotomies. Most importantly, the fractured locus, in remaining fractured, always provides openings for decolonising. Because of the mutual determination of the intersubjective and the subjective, this leads to profound implications. Lugones aims to “focus on the subjective-intersubjective to reveal that disaggregating oppressions disaggregates the subjective-intersubjective springs of colonized women's agency,” (Lugones p.748).

This is exemplified in the approach taken by Aileen Morton-Robinson in her book, “The white possessive: property, power, and Indigenous sovereignty,” (2015). She emphasises that in Australia, whiteness operates as a justification for a rationalist possessive knowledge and a patriarchal white logic that claims Australia as Australia. All of this occurs through a disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty. For Moreton-Robinson, there is an incommensurable difference between Indigenous people and their enduring ontological relationship to land, and to all other non-Indigenous people who occupy Australia. She argues that

Indigenous belonging challenges the assumption that Australia is postcolonial because our relation to land, what I conceptualize as an ontological belonging, is omnipresent, and continues to unsettle non- Indigenous belonging based on illegal dispossession (2015, p.4).

Moreover, “Indigenous people may have been incorporated in and seduced by the cultural forms of the coloniser, but this has not diminished the ontological relationship to land,” (p.9). Rather than a religion, spirituality, or some other mystical primitive way of being, it is a profoundly different philosophy based in ontologies, cosmologies, and ethical systems which coloniality, through systems such as gender, obscures, but according to both Lugones and Moreton-Robinson, cannot entirely erase.

The implications of this extend to questions of potential subjectivities more broadly. When Australian Indigenous peoples restore language and culture, they live in what Lugones would categorise as subjective-intersubjective systems which determine who and how they are, and which are separate from, and resistant to, colonial systems. At the fractured locus, where colonial people are dealing simultaneously with non-modern and modern ontologies, cosmologies, and epistemologies, the colonial difference occurs. Thus, when colonised Indigenous peoples speak language on Country, they make new subjectivities. When the non-colonial model of subjective/intersubjective community resists the erasure and genocide of coloniality, it becomes more, it creates a more resistant subject. Lugones points to this: “focusing on the resister difference I mean to unveil what is obscured,” (2010, p.748).

To achieve this resistant subjectivity, Lugones emphasises the need to bracket out basic Western categories such as man and woman for new possibilities to arise. It is necessary to be cautious in using such terms for only “in bracketing [ ] can we appreciate the different logic that organises the social in the resistant response,” (p.749). To speak from the non-modern perspective, we must bypass the idea of gender and its deployment as an essential category. This allows the possibility of other kinds of subjectivities based on neither gender nor sex to emerge. Moreover, this way of thinking not only constitutes a powerful rethink of colonialism but offers new possibilities to all forms of normative subjectivities and sexualities. This is particularly relevant to understanding current developments in LGBTQIA+ cultures which are deliberately exploring new kinds of subjects.

It also points to possible profound implications for philosophy in general. As Irigaray (1995) suggests in “The Question of the Other”, “Western philosophy, perhaps all philosophy, has been constructed around a singular subject. For centuries, no one imagined that different subjects

might exist, or that man and woman in particular might be different subjects,” (1995, p.7). It could even be suggested that the revelation of the possibility of such radically different subjectivities founded in alternative relationships with others, human and non-human, and with the earth itself, offer ways to rethink our inhabitation with the planet in less destructive ways. As Irigaray (2018) posits, it could lead to “an organization of the world which does not result from the imposition of a human *logos* on nature but results from the *logos* that nature is,” (Irigaray 2018, p.3).

Lugones reframes Quijano’s idea of the “coloniality of power” by introducing gender and other categories such as the colonial difference and the fractured locus. This radical move makes the question of coloniality about fundamental philosophical questions of ontology, cosmology, and epistemology, which allow access to the living experience of the colonised. Lugones is locating, describing, and activating a resistant subjectivity which, through its exclusion by imposed gender and colonial systems, finds power and agency on its own terms in a way that fundamentally takes on a role of resistance. It is a profound way forward for a decolonising imperative for post-colonial subjects and a way to other new liberatory subjectivities. This is the primary implication. Lugones is positing and describing a way towards new forms of intersubjectivity which yield new subjectivities.



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