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Notes for Thinking about Feminist Foreign Policy from a Decolonial and Communitarian Feminist Perspective

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AGUSTINA GARINO, AUG 20 2023

In recent decades, gender perspectives and feminist studies have gradually been incorporated into the discipline of International Relations (IR) and the field of foreign policy. As researchers delve into various aspects, it is noteworthy that academia has shown significant interest in defining the scope of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). First and foremost, addressing this question requires clarification that there is no single definition; it is a broad concept linked to the increasing significance of gender agendas in international politics. Secondly, FFP reflects the intention to challenge power hierarchies, and gender norms, and to reconsider the origins of the State.

In practice, FFP often emerges as a project that prioritizes gender equality and respect for the rights of women and other marginalized groups in relation to other states (Garino 2023). Examples can be found in programs implemented in Mexico, Sweden, Germany, Canada, and others. Particularly in Latin America, projecting FFP becomes a comprehensive task that underscores the need to address the diverse situations experienced by women and dissident groups. It is crucial to avoid researching their issues and demands as homogeneous groups, as this may lead to partial or incomplete diagnoses of their realities.

To undertake this challenge, decolonial studies (Quijano 2000; Mignolo, 2007), closely tied to anti-imperial, anti-racist, and anti-colonial thinking, provide a fundamental tool. The consequences of colonization on the American territories, its symbolic and material impact on social relations, and the construction of knowledge are explored through the analytical categories they create, such as the exploration of the colonality of being, power, and knowledge.

Through epistemological critique, this school of thought offers theoretical tools to examine various cases from situated approaches. This perspective allows for a socio-historical contextualization of the object/subject of research. It emphasizes individual and community spheres and the multiple realities that women face in the region. Incorporating situated analytical views for the generation of FFP implies prioritizing projects that take into account the cultural, identitarian, social, political, and economic realities of women, aiding in understanding that they are not a homogeneous group and that these categories affect the development and understanding of politics and international relations.

Furthermore, to conduct their analysis and link it to the international arena, decolonial intellectuals have focused on the experience of Latin America's subalternization in the face of hierarchical global power relations and their impact on epistemologies, sexuality, gender, identities, culture, etc. Subalternization refers to what is subordinated due to a historical, social, and cultural dynamic between the hegemonic class and the set or group of dominated people. This is a consequence of the colonization of the American territories and the imposition of social relations structured under modern-colonial logic. This process has occurred through marginalization, the use of force, the establishment of social classes, gender exclusions, and the imposition of binary categories, among other factors.

To deepen and expand this critique into a decolonial feminist standpoint, author María Lugones (2008) constructed the concept of gender coloniality by drawing from the contributions of Afro-American feminism and intersectionality.

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By invoking this term, the notion of a modern-colonial gender system is introduced. It is portrayed as an additional form of women's subjugation, taking into account the heteronormative and patriarchal dominance of social relationships based on difference. This broadens and complexifies the focus of decolonial studies, for instance, in explaining the position that colonized women have occupied in social relations, revealing that they have been part of the lower scale of the colonial structure. This highlights the importance of gender analysis in exposing the subordination and social exclusion of indigenous women in the conquered territories.

Similarly, the contributions of communitarian feminism, which seek to reverse all forms of patriarchal oppression through situated thinking and as a political practice of resistance, are highlighted through the thoughts of Julieta Paredes (Paredes 2006; 2013). With an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-system, anti-colonial, non-heteronormative, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-racist, and ecological imprint, communitarian feminism aims to develop a theoretical and political proposal based on the Andean indigenous conception of the world. It presents a perspective that advocates for ancestral demands against all forms of colonial oppression, due to the imposition of hierarchical and patriarchal relations.

The epistemic formulation of communitarian feminism revisits the concept of community, with the intent of avoiding binary relations between men and women. It proposes adopting community as a transformative political unit, considering it an organism where each of its members is unique, necessary, and autonomous. To consider FFP along these lines implies viewing the world as an expanded community, arising from the ethical obligation to care for all living beings, placing women and nature on an equal footing with male primacy. Taking this approach, social and international relations should be based on complementarity, reciprocity, and solidarity among all parties. Projecting a community-based FFP entails criticism of modern international politics, the primacy of patriarchal structures, male dominance in the discipline, and specifically, the power held by elite white men from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

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