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Challenging subordination: the women's movements*

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In the contemporary world, the women's movement is both plural and diverse in nature, and possesses a wide repertoire of challenges regarding female subordination. When discussing women's subordination, I am referring to a multiple cultural, economic, social and political plundering. In this sense, I am shifting the notion of subordination that Gayatari Spivak (1993), Edward Said (1996) and other specialists of cultural and post-colonialism studies have applied to the post-colonial societies, towards an analysis of the gender relationships of power, even in the West. With the reappropriation of Gramsci's classic definition of the term *subordinate* as an indicator of the have-nots in the economic spectrum, scholars of post-colonialism have elaborated a notion of the subordinate subject in the context of colonial and post-colonial societies. Their approach to subordination has emphasized this multiple cultural, economic, social and political plundering, in other words, the colonial and post-colonial legacy left after the imposition of cultural imperialism. From a historical dimension, our proposal resides in a vision of women as subordinate subjects, but whose subordination resides on many levels. For this reason, it is essential to emphasize the importance of the cultural mechanisms which reinforce a complex patriarchal mentality of gender subordination together with the existing legal subordination, a lack of political rights or discriminatory practices in the work, social and family spheres. In this way, one of the reference points of this study is the dimension of cultural mechanisms of subordination and female subjection. Furthermore, this approach allows us to better understand how women can interiorize the discourses of their own subordination and become agents of its continuity (Lerner, 1986). What is significant from my point of view, is that from this very position of subordination, women can subvert the traditional gender discourse to give it a new meaning (Nash, 1999a, 1999b). In this way, they can claim their rights from the traditional logic of gender subordination, which is subversive in it horizons. In this framework, the women's movement tackles both the elimination of legal discrimination and challenges the cultural values which keep them in a position of subordination. This study stems from the principle that there is no single female experience of inequality, and thus it is necessary to know the plurality of approaches and cultural diversity of the women's movement (Nash, 2004).

The new gender system introduced to the new industrial world of the factories was based on the principle of feminine inequality and subordination, and enforced by the law. A discriminatory legal regime regulated women's inequality and their marginalization throughout the 19th century and for most of the 20th century. Females were considered inferior beings, subject to the male authority first of their father, and then of their husband. By denying them the quality of being a political or historical subject, women were excluded from political rights and citizenship.

Cultural representations and images of the *other*, the *otherness* of gender, ascribe shared meanings to things, processes and people, and influence the development of discriminatory social practices in a particular manner. They are dynamic and are reproduced at the scale of images, models, beliefs and values in each context and time. Stuart Hall has pointed out the general importance of the impact of cultural representations in the configuration of our current societies (Hall, 1997). According

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to him, they are decisive due to the meaning they give culture when transmitting shared values. They also delimit collective identities through images, rites and multiple symbolic devices which enunciate differences and confirm them at the time they induce social practices of subordination (Nash, 1995a). In this way the gender discourse, which emerged with the construction of the contemporary society during the 19th century, acted as a cultural representation reinforcing female subordination through practices of deprivation of rights, social exclusion and the obliged confinement of women to the household.

Initially based on laws that consolidated inequality, the gender system was reinforced even more effectively and lastingly with the development of a discourse on the household which legitimized women's confinement to the house and their civil and political subjection (Nash, 2004). This discourse created the model of the domestic woman, whose sole identity was to be a wife and mother—the angel of the house—based on the unavoidable biological fate of reproduction and family care, and restricted to the private space of the home. The logic of the gender discourse during the 19th century and part of the 20th century was based on the biosocial thought of an existing natural sexual difference that justified male predominance. According to this gender hierarchy, men were considered superior beings, while women were seen as dependent, subordinate and defined in accordance to men. In this discourse, the feminine cultural identity derived from nature, motherhood and a biological capacity for reproduction (Jordanova, 1989).

The importance of this gender discourse falls on its capacity to direct the correct feminine behavior and to transmit collective codes with regards to femininity. In the collective imaginary, this discourse evoked a female archetype very different to the male one: in the words of French republican Jules Simon: *What is man's vocation? It is to be a good citizen. And woman's? It is to be a good wife and a good mother. The former is called in some way to the exterior world. The latter to an interior one.* (Mc Millan,1981). In her popular book, *Flora o la educación de una niña*, published in 1888, the renowned Spanish educator Pilar Pascual de Sanjuán also reflects this idea of relegating women to the household: *The woman, especially, seems destined by Providence to live retired in the modest home, perfuming it with the essence of her ignored virtue, embellishing it with the simple grace; in the way that those who have received from Heaven a manly value, a privileged talent, have been more unfortunate than most of their sex* (Pascual de Sanjuán, 1918). As this fragment shows, the household discourse served as a system of symbolic and cultural domination in explaining the threat of marginalization there existed for any woman that rejected the prescribed gender codes. In effect, the strength of this discourse as a control mechanism resided in the symbolic violence of that implicit threat, which invoked the misfortunes that would follow any woman who violated the gender rules of conduct. A woman who did not fulfill her household chores correctly represented a serious threat to the family's happiness and well-being: "A w*oman exerts… [La mujer ejerce en la familia ascendiente sin límites]. The beauty and seduction with which she is endowed can move the wills, and, according to the use of these precious gifts, she is dragged towards good or evil (…) The father orders the good and suppresses the bad tendencies; the mother promotes the good feelings and love. When the woman does not fulfill such pleasant duty, the damage is almost always irreparable and grows by degree. The woman, in charge of the administration of the household, is the crux of the family, and when this crux goes moudly or is out of its mind, the family is threatened and ultimately ruined*" (Doña F. de A.P.& Mariano Carderera, 1856). As a matter of fact, different manifestations of symbolic violence, which threatened women breaking the established patriarchal order with tragedy, contained mechanisms of cultural pressure to force women to adapt to the current gender codes. Their impact led to an internalization of these patterns of conduct, facilitating the female consent to the pre-assigned gender roles. These symbolic threats invoking misfortunes, unhappiness and ruin complicated the development of an open confrontation with the dominating cultural registers and behavioral codes.

Another manifestation of the same naturalizing discourse of sexual differences in social and cultural terms was the insistence that motherly love was the only backbone of femininity. Among the feminine attributes, maternal instinct was considered one of the most defining ones. It was referred to as the explicative principle for the characteristics of femininity: tenderness, abnegation and dedication to others. Women were defined in terms of maternal emotions. While reason, aggressiveness, self-interest and individualism were seen as the defining characteristics of masculinity, maternal instinct crowned the feminine attributes. So late as 1927, the prominent doctor Gregorio Marañón declared: *Therefore, for us it is unquestionable that a woman should be a mother above all, forgetting about everything else if necessary, and that, because of an inexcusable obligation of her sex; such as man has to apply his energy to work for the same inexcusable law of his sexuality. Let us hear again the voice of God, persistent and eternal: "You, woman shall give birth; you, man shall work"* (Marañón, 1927a).

In this way, the household discourse influenced a collective imaginary that was very effective in assigning a role and a place for women based on the collective beliefs of nature, religion, traditional culture and modern science. It had an extraordinary impact since it attributed the gender roles to a divine destiny, an immutable nature, and an irrefutable biological commandment. Thus, any challenges to subordination on behalf of the women's movements around the world implied questioning deeply-rooted cultural and religious ideas.

The Resistance and Women's Movements

The principle of equality became the backbone in the defense of women's rights in the West and most parts around the world. Although there have also been some women's movements based on the acceptance of housework and gender differences, the argument of equality has been the political base which marked the course of both the women's movements and the public policies regarding it, from the French revolution until today.

Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Citizen

The well-known political discourse of the French revolution was based on the principles of liberty, equality and human rights as the universal paradigm. In the course of the revolutionary events, French women fulfilled an active role in both the political process and in the redevelopment of a more egalitarian discourse which included them as citizens and subject to the new political rights derived from the revolutionary transformation. The first expressions of a collective voice of women coincide with the development of the revolutionary process, the formation of female republican clubs and the presentation of the first political declarations of women's rights.

On 1791—in the middle of the French revolution—Olympe de Gouges presented the *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the [female] Citizen"*, one of the clearest political formulations in the defense of female citizenship and of the principle of equal rights between men and women. Arising in the framework of the mobilization of women in the Third Estate and of the republicans in Parisian clubs defending the revolution principles and their rights, this founding text for the right to equality denounced the exclusion of women from political rights and citizenship in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789, one of the fundamental documents on human rights. Olympe de Gouges' *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Citizen* on the other hand, is based on the assumption that, "*Woman is born free and lives equal to man in her rights"* (Alonso& Belinchón, 1989). It appeals to the citizen status of women and demanded their rights as such. It argues that, "*The law must be the expression of the general will; all female and male citizens must contribute either personally or through their representatives to its formation; it must be the same for all: male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public employment according to their capacity and without other distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents"* (Alonso & Belinchón, 1989). The cornerstone of the Declaration was to include women as free and equal. It should also be pointed out that for the first time a political program claiming female suffrage was created by women themselves. De Gouges emphasized that if women could be guillotined then they should also have the right to a representative in the preparation of laws and national sovereignty. She requested the right to freedom, to property, to public positions, to vote, and to private property. Her proposal also included rights in the household, such as the rejection of sexual double-standards, the legal equality of couples, and of legitimate as well as illegitimate children.

Despite this formulation made in the political language of human rights and equality, women continued to be excluded of the political representation formulated during the French Revolution. Under the relentless Jacobin repression, women were disqualified as *tigresses*, *cannibals* or *heads of Medusa* (Roudinesco, 1990) and forced to move away from public politics. Olympe de Gouges was guillotined in November 1793 for her Girondist political affiliations as well as for her defense of women's rights. The *Moniteur* of 19 November 1793 recalled de Gouges as *born with an impetuous imagination*, *taking her delusions as an inspiration of nature.Començà desvariant i acabà adoptant el projecto de los pèrfids que volien dividir França; she wanted to be a man of State, and it seems that the law wanted to punish this conspirator for forgetting the virtues advisable to her sex*" (Roudinesco, 1990). It is interesting to point out that de Gouges' punishment was mostly due to her breaking of the models of gender and femininity by wanting to become a "man of state", and thus forgetting the attributes of her sex. The Napoleonic Code (1804), which later came into force in many other European countries, prohibited by law the civil and political rights of women, confined them again to the household, and made the political system and the civil rights a privilege of men until after WWI. The early defense of women's political rights in the *Declaration* did not prevent that throughout the following century, women would remain excluded from the practice of citizenship in Europe and the United States. The European and American legislations denied them the status of political subjects and ordained their social subordination to the family sphere when they established the principle of male authority symbolized by the father/husband. Despite the diffusion of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* in the liberal and democratic revolutions which followed during the 19th century, and the gradual recognition of men's political rights, women continued to be unrecognized until well into the 20th century. The revolutions of the 19th century with their liberal and democratic reform projects only consecrated the masculine monopoly of the political system.

The Declaration of Sentiments of Seneca Falls

Another example of a public proposal for the equality of political rights is the *Declaration of Sentiments* of Seneca Falls. This political text was the result of a convention held in Seneca Falls, New York, in the summer of 1848. Just like *The Communist Manifesto*, written by Marx and Engels during that same year, became the sole foundational text for the worker's movement, the *Declaration of Sentiments* of Seneca Falls, constituted a paradigmatic manifesto for the women's movement. In a context in which women's consciousness had been raised by their participation in the anti-slavery and religious reformation movements, Elizabeth Candy Stanton and Lucretia Mott celebrated a great convention in July 1848 with the objective of discussing women's social, civil and religious condition. This collective text, agreed upon by those feminist pioneers gathered at Seneca Falls, expressed a radical feminist philosophy which denounced the abuses men exerted upon women: "*The history of humanity is that of repeated humiliations and usurpations of men against women, with the direct objective of establishing an absolute tyranny over them*" (Nash & Álvarez González, 2002).

As *freedom's daughters*, the women at Seneca Falls appropriated the current political discourses of American culture to legitimize their feminist philosophy. As a matter of fact, the *Declaration* used the language and structure of the American *Dec-*

laration of Independence of 1776 in order to confer political legitimacy to their claims and a philosophy of the American political culture. It also used constitutional liberalism to demand that *all men and women were created equally*; *that they are provided by God with a series of inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness* (Nash & Álvarez González, 2002). The *Declaration* demanded a large number of rights: equality between men and women, equality of wages and labor options, the rights to freedom, to wealth and property, to employment and political participation, an access to education, equality in marriage and the abolition of the double sexual moral. Unlike Olympia de Gouges' text, the Declaration of Seneca Falls had a clear religious base line. Promoted by women coming from the protestant and Quaker dissidence, they were in favor of the equality of women's access to the religious mission, claimed an end to the male monopoly of the pulpit and the guarantee of an equal participation of women in religious affairs. These women never questioned their own Christianity, but fought to rectify the discriminatory content and the misogynous practices inside religion. Thus, as early as 1854, Lucretia Mott made a clear distinction between religion itself, and the intermediation of religious professions.

Despite the degree of mobilization, when the moment of granting freedom to slaves and the vote to black males came in 1869, women remained excluded from suffrage in the United States until many decades afterwards, in 1922. Both the *Declaration of Women's Rights and Citizenship* and the *Declaration* of Seneca Falls fell into oblivion and remained ignored for decades. We should question the meaning of this historical amnesia and the causes that led to the disappearance of such decisive texts in the fight for women's rights.

Suffrage and antisuffrage: the British case

The paradigmatic case of the British suffragette movement illustrates the difficulties in obtaining the right to vote. Based on a long tradition of English liberalism, suffragists defended the principle of equality of rights to demand the same voting conditions as men. Female suffrage, nevertheless, aroused implacable opposition from all political tendencies. Antisuffragists claimed that if women were to join the public sphere, it meant they would abandon their homes, with the disastrous consequences this would entail for the existing patriarchal order. Their public presence would represent a clear menace to the *Angel in the House* archetype. As a matter of fact, hostility towards women's demands of their political rights was not formulated in terms of a political, liberal or democratic logic, but on a rejection based on the social disorder that would result from men losing their privileges and influences over women. They disapproved female suffrage for it would endanger social order and traditional cultural values. Antisuffragist propaganda stressed that granting the vote to women would adulterate feminine essence and transgress the sexual divisions established in both family and society. Women's presence in forbidden public places was expounded as an inadmissible role inversion, claiming that the female vote would lead to the masculinization of women, their neglect of social and family duties, and a lack of sexual restraint. The supposed hysterical nature of women also figured among the repertoire of arguments as an impediment to their participation in national politics and as a threat to the British Empire.

After forty years of work, the moderate National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, let by Millicent Fawcett was not able to obtain the vote. Then, around the beginning of the 20th century, a radicalization of the movement was produced as a result of the necessity for a direct action suffrage. En 1903, Emmeline Pankhurst created the Women's Social and Political Union in Manchester, an organization famous for its militancy which began in 1905. Among its objectives figured the right to vote and the use of the power gained though suffrage to *establish the equality of rights and opportunities between sexes and to promote social and industrial welfare to the community* (Rover, 1974). Suffragists adopted retaliation strategies that included violence, sabotage, setting fire to businesses and public establishments, and other aggressions such as throwing tomatoes or stones to the private residences of well-known politicians, or burning the slogan *Votes for Women* with acid in several golf fields. This lead to great political unrest since many of the imprisoned *suffragettes* belonged to important bourgeois families. Their demand to be recognized as political prisoners was followed by an increase in police repression, demonstrations, hunger strikes by the imprisoned suffragettes, and their subsequent force feeding. Having become a political and social problem, the outbreak of the First World War marked a period of truce when suffragettes temporarily abandoned their fight for the vote, to become involved in the war effort. After it was over in 1918, the vote was limited to women in the higher economic classes who were also over 30 years old. Englishwomen had to wait until 1928 for universal suffrage, only three years before the introduction of the female vote in Spain, on the year 1931.

The demand for women's suffrage was a radical demand for the time's mentality and cultural standards, and the degree of resistance from some occidental countries in denying them citizenship rights is clear.

Imperial feminism and anti-colonial response from India

The social phenomenon of the women's movement was not restricted to Europe and the West. In the almost global world of imperial expansion of the late 19th century, it also became a movement with international ramifications and confrontation between the West's attempts to impose proposals based on women's rights as a symbol of European civilization and the collective response they received from women in the colonized societies.

The European imperial expansion at the end of the 19th century represented the assertion of power, sovereignty, and military, political, economic and cultural control of the colonized societies. Thus, it was through a complex ideology that the imperial culture based on the notions of white man's supremacy and the superiority of occidental civilization was transmitted

(Mangan, 1990). Chandra Talpade Moharty proposed a study of gender in her writings to better identify the most significant characteristics of imperial power and control (Talpade Moharty, 1991). Imperial culture envisioned an ideological construction for the consolidation of white masculinity, leading to the consequent racialization and sexualization of the colonized people. Another significant element of imperial design was the effect of colonial institutions and their politics in the transformation of indigenous groups and the consolidation of the gender system in the hegemonic middle class structures of the colonized metropolitan areas. In her essays on imperial culture, Talpade Moharty points out the emergence of a feminist conscience in this colonial context. According to her, this feminism was characterized on one hand for the duality of its anti-colonial position and its alignment with the national liberation movements, and for its critical attitude of rejection towards the patriarchal practices characteristic of the anti-colonial nationalism on the other (Talpade Moharty, 1991).

In the case of the British Empire, progress and women's rights were the distinctive elements of occidental civilization that led to the diffusion of this notion of white superiority. According to this, the lack of women's rights was a decisive indicator of the existing degree of savagery of the colonial societies. This lead to situations so contradictory such as Lord Cromer, the highest representative of the British Antisuffragist League and most virulent discreditor of the English suffragists in Egypt, becoming the greatest defender of the Arab women's rights and promoter of abandoning the veil's use (Nash, 2004).

According to Mangan, this colonial mentality was spread through multiple expressions of formal and informal socialization, through diverse *civilizing* agents that acted as missionaries, Christian preachers and teachers that repeated the cultural and hierarchical values of the Empire (Mangan, 1990). Despite embodying secondary figures, Englishwomen developed an important role in the task of spreading imperial culture. Between 1880 and 1920, there was a convergence between feminism and imperialism in Great Britain (Devereux, 1999), why is why we talk of Englishwomen exporting an imperial feminism to the colonies.

Many English feminists considered themselves as *mothers of the Empire*, reinforcing the principle of white superiority and identifying themselves with the project of imperial expansion (Hannam & Holden, 2002). They promoted the lecture of the women's rights in the colonies as a part of the progressive movement of *civilization* against the savagery of other cultures which oppressed women (Rendall, 1987). They argued that their interventions would soften the toughest aspects of the male imperial politics and that their reforms would improve the lives of women in the colonies. With great ambivalence, they promoted an imperial feminism that carried out a message of white occidental superiority, and the Anglo-Saxon feminist model of emancipation as the only valid one.

A sample of this imperial feminism in colonial India can be found in the book published in 1927 by Katherine Mayo, *Mother India*. Pretending to denounce female oppression in India, the book concentrates on several examples of female discrimination such as child marriage, infant motherhood and other inequalities that the author attributed to the patriarchal Hindu culture. She concludes that Hindu culture was responsible for these inequalities, that India was not prepared for self-determination, and therefore needed the *civilizing* influence of the British (Sinha, 2000).

Given this proposal of imperial feminism, an anti-colonial feminism appeared among Hindu women. They rejected Mayo's imperial feminist attitude, denouncing the great insult this type of approaches constituted for them. These anti-British, nationalist feminists rejected the interference of imperial feminism. At the same time though, they maintained their criticism of the patriarchal Hindu nationalism (Sinha, 2000), and demanded equality for Indian women.

According to the nationalist Sarojini Naidu, it was a matter of demonstrating that Indian women themselves were capable of obtaining their emancipation and improving their life ambitions. Their rejection for the intrusion of imperial feminism is clearly expressed in a lecture imparted at the University of Calcutta in 1928: "*Indian women should answer to all those who come, under the pretext of friendship, to interpret India to the world and exploit their weakness and expose their home secrets (…) even if we are oppressed, treated as goods and forced to lay over the pyres of our husbands, our redemption is in our hands. We will break the walls that imprison us and we will tear the veils that suppress us. We will do it with the miracle of femininity. We do not ask for friends or enemies disguised as friends, to come to exploit us while they pretend to interpret, help and comfort our femininity*" (Sinha, 2000). By arguing against the condescending, imperialist and paternalistic discourse of white, Anglo-Saxon feminists, Naidu makes it clear that Hindu women posses the capacity to establish an agenda for their own rights. It was not about rejecting Hindu culture, but reforming its discriminatory practices with regards to women.

From the beginning of the XIX century, the Hindu women's movement has had a long tradition of fighting for their rights. Among their demands were the elimination of the *sati* (tradition of obliged or voluntary sacrifice of the widow in her husband's funeral pyre) and of polygamy, the right of widows to remarry and an access to education, property and political rights. The evolution of feminism after WWI led to the consolidation of independent feminine organizations as a part of the anti-Imperial movement, such as the Indian Association of Women, founded in 1917, and the All India Women's Conference a decade later, which brought Muslim and Indian women together in 1927. Among its many points were: raising the legal marriage to the age of fourteen, abolition of child marriage, compulsory primary education, facilitation of women's access to the educational system, equality of inheritance rights and improvement of worker's and children's living conditions. From 1918 onwards— the same year when a restricted concession was awarded to English women—the National Congress supported that women should be given the right to vote. In 1950, three years after independence, women obtained suffrage and citizenship.

It is important to point out that it was not an easy task to develop women's rights movements in the colonial and post-colonial countries. Rejection of feminism and women's movements

was commonly at the core of Third World societies. Certain political and religious forces considered that they merely represented a reflex of occidental elitist perspectives—far-off, foreign ideas with regards to their own culture or religion—. During both colonial times and independence, antifeminists rejected feminism as an expression that challenged traditional culture or religion. It was also denounced as a carrier of modernity and thus a threat to traditional social structures. For this reason, many sectors confronted the women's movement since they considered it represented a cultural imperialism based on the occidental values of femininity, and which questioned the established gender models (Heng, 1997). Against this opposition, Third World specialists and feminists demanded the lawfulness of expressing their particular vision of feminism and their right to formulate their own definition of it. Indian philosopher Uma Narayan claimed the legitimacy of women challenging their own culture from a feminism rooted in their own society (Narayan, 1997). From this perspective, it is necessary to identify the social processes that women underwent, together with their theoretical proposals as a contextual dynamic and within their societies' cultural and socioeconomic frameworks.

Women's Liberation Movement

The first feminist wave fought for women's rights in both the public and private spheres, although the demand for citizenship and equal political rights predominated throughout its trajectory. The second wave of contemporary feminism arose around 1960 under the name of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM). This new feminism was part of the social movements of the 1960s (Laraña, Johnston, Gusfield, 1994). It emerged parallel to the civil rights, the Afro-American rights, the pacifist, the student's, the New Left, and the decolonization movements, which promoted innovation and collective strategic actions. Just like these other movements, it was characterized by a plurality of ideas and values, an informal organizational structure, the rejection of a hierarchical management, and the democratization of decision processes. But it distinguished itself from the previous movements due to a strategy that relied on informal rather than on more structured and organized networks (Melucci, 1989, 1960).

Several studies have shown that the new social movements which appeared in the 1960s represented a change of ideology as their driving force, and the change of politics of collective identity as generators of social responses (Laraña, Johnston, Gusfield, 1994; Melucci, 1989, 1996). The WLM evolved from the construction of a collective identity for women, which in turn gave extraordinary importance to the relation between the individual and the collective, the public and the private, in fact, the defining epicenter of this movement was the innovative phrase *the personal is political*. The intimate, personal aspects of private life took on a central dimension in identifying female oppression, and therefore in the project of women's personal and social transformation. After identifying that "problem that has no name", in Betty Freidan's words, the new agenda included goals such as personal development, self-esteem, and an individual identity which were crucial to conquer women's personal liberation.

Under the Francoist dictatorship, the necessity for democratic equality and liberty was another of the driving forces for the new women's movement of the 1970s and the transition (Nash, 2004; Pagès i Blanc, 2005). The new feminism also challenged the stereotypes associated to women. It denounced sexism, and the stereotype which did not allow women to develop their potential as a person. In this sense, the conclusions obtained from the Jornadas Catalanes de la Dona held in Barcelona in May 1976, made manifest the need to expose the traditional stereotypes imposed on women and denounce the continuity of domestication: "*We denounce as a consequence of paternalistic power, the myth of Virginity en which the legitimacy of children is based, the myth of maternity as the essence of feminine conduct and all the other myths that have been created surrounding/around women"* (Catalan Commission, 1977).

The WLM's program demanded multiple rights but insisted particularly on reproductive rights (procreative liberty), legalization of divorce and abortion, sexual liberation and birth control, the creation of family planning centers, the rejection of domestic violence and the recognition of the value of work (Catalan Commission, 1977). Family and marriage were denounced as the central cause for oppression, while criticism to obliged maternity was at the center of reproductive rights and female autonomy demands.

The famous slogan *Sisterhood is Powerful* (Morgan, 1970) which was first heard in 1968, pushed women towards self-recognition as a group and to the consolidation of their collective identity. This in turn led to the generalized idea that all women suffered from the same oppression and that feminism was monolithic in its approaches. Thus, a hegemonic universalistic discourse about women and feminism was created by the WLM in the West. This rhetoric of a common oppression pointed out the importance of domestic oppression as the mechanism for women's universal subordination. Although there were other expressions in the women's agenda, this standardizing vision was perceived as the key of a Western imposition on non-white women in developing countries.

Critical voices from the Third World

It was precisely this standardizing global projection of the movement's postulates that was criticized by feminists in the Third World, who accused it of trying to impose a false unity that denied the different experiences of non-white women. These non-conformist voices realized the "whiteness" load in western feminism hindered the recognition of its historical subjectivity from diversity's point of view. They demonstrated that the standardization of woman as a historical subject is the result of linking her exclusively to the white occidental woman image. Beginning with the idea of the universality of female subordination, a sisterhood had been created to defy patriarchy. But this point of view was sustained in the predominance of a Western, white, feminist model, which ignored the plural voices of the different feminisms that arose in the Third World

(Talpade Mohanty, 1997). Impregnated in a colonial discourse that reinforced the superiority of white culture, women in the third world were systematically seen as a subordinate association, traditional and incapable of historical transformation.

Leila Ahmed has criticized this standardized global vision which did not distinguish the collective experience of women in the Third World (Ahmed, 1992). She brands this Western feminism of cultural imperialism. Western beliefs of a universal feminist alliance, individualism and social action were imposed on women in a non-western context with criteria that implied denying validation of their own challenges and strategies. Under the flag of global sisterhood, the Western version of feminism was diffused giving priority to the individual woman in the struggle for the development of her capacities and her integration in the public sphere (Davis, 2002). Based on the ideals of equal opportunities, and individual access to economic, scientific and professional resources, this western perspective concealed a vision of women in developing countries as subordinate, traditional and lacking management. In this way, as Valerie Amos and Pratibna Parmar argue quite eloquently, "*Feminist theories which examine our cultural practices as 'feudal residues' or label us 'traditional', also portray us as politically immature women who need to be versed and schooled in the ethos of Western Feminism. They need to be continually challenged*." (Talpade Mohanty, Russo, Torres, 1991).

The critical voices have emphasized the importance of specific social and economic contexts that influence the decisions of Third-World women. Thus, given the Western approach of an individualism based on equality, the great importance of the community approach present in most movements in the developing countries is emphasized. Unlike the centralism of gender rights in Western feminism, the economic and social conditions acted as the driving force in their case. The community interests often defined their agenda. Furthermore, their movements should be contextualized in the framework of anti-imperialist social dynamics, and of the legacy of colonialism as the decisive setting for female action.

Another remarkable aspect is that occidental interpretation has often implied considering non-white women in racial terms. This racial view has implied their naturalization, often seeing them as beings defined in a natural and immutable way, given their ethnic, cultural or religious background. In this way, they have been denied the capacity of historical direction, remaining outside social dynamics. This simplifying view could be paternalistically well-intentioned, but as a whole it is full of values that inevitably led to the invisibility of women's movements in the Third World. The insistent view towards the feminine immaturity in developing countries or towards the permanence of discriminatory practices has been criticized because it also reinforces the victimized view which has overshadowed their capacity of action in defense of their interests. At the same time, there has been a strong criticism of the insistence that genital mutilation or the veil's use by Muslim women, are the only relevant referents of a collective experience for women in Africa or in the Muslim world. This generates generalizing topics from the narrow perspective of victimization and cultural underdevelopment (Ahmed, 1992; Moghadam, 1993, 1994). In this way, many other vital aspects such as the responses of Arab and Muslim women themselves have been ignored (Ahmed, 1992; El Saadawi, 1997; Moghadam, 1993, 1994).

Leila Ahmed has vindicated the legitimacy of Muslim Arab feminism and women's resistance to the subordination generated in the heart of Muslim Arab societies. By denouncing the notion of Western feminism which incurs on the existence of a forced connection between culture and women's status, she has revealed the hidden message perpetrated by Western feminism in both its current and historical versions: women's progress can only be achieved by first abandoning their autochthonous culture. She has gauged as cultural imperialism the insistence on exclusively reading the veil as a symbol of oppression and therefore, of obligatory disuse, as well as the presumption of a need to abandon Muslim or Arab culture as the only way for emancipation and social progress. With a devastating irony, Ahmed has made a parallelism of this logic applied to Westerners: "*It has never been argued, not even in Mary Wollstonecraft's days, when European women did not have rights, nor in our own by even the most radical feminist, that given the male domination and injustice towards women that prevailed in the West's written history, the only resource for Western women was to abandon their culture and look for another one. The idea seems absurd, and nonetheless, it constantly figures in the focus of their proposals for improvement*" (Ahmed, 1992).

As Ahmed suggests, most of these ideas assume that Western women can follow their feminist objectives through the challenge and renegotiation of their cultural legacy. On the other hand, Muslim and Arab women can only accomplish these goals by forsaking their culture and adopting the "non-androcentric, non-sexist" Western one. This perspective of cultural superiority has generated a filter of unquestionable Western values, making women's movements in the Third World invisible, underestimating initiatives of social or patriarchal resistance. The contributions of these non-conformist global movements have forced us to rethink the terms in which the definitions of feminism are elaborated, to avoid falling into the hierarchical trap of establishing norms that reinforce subordination. On the other hand, they require the recognition of plural resistance values, criteria and strategies of the same value in the framework of the global cultural diversity.

Given the usual centralism of gender as a base for equal individual rights in the Western approach of feminism, Valerie Moghadam suggested the need to define feminism in the Third World as a plural social phenomenon which includes gender, ethnic groups, social classes and policies of identity (Moghadam, 1994). In this way, although the access to equality and rights can be a common goal to many women, gender discrimination does not necessarily represent the only or most important area of oppression for women in the Third World. According to their social and economic contexts, gender discrimination is not necessarily the only area of oppression: structural poverty, economic or political exploitation, sexism, they all converge in situations of subordination for which it is necessary to find specific definitions and answers.

In our multicultural societies, the others' knowledge is deci-

sive in the consolidation of a sustainable coexistence and a dialogue between cultures. It is necessary to expand our Western horizons to make patent the historical development of women in the Third World. The recognition of cultural diversity, and very importantly, of the centrality of the theories elaborated by non-Western women is essential to elaborate a global history of the women's movement in the contemporary world that does not produce a distorted view of its value. In this global society, the social phenomenon of immigration and of the feminization of migratory flows toward the West makes it crucial to know the history and culture of women in order to settle an intercultural coexistence in our society. In order to understand the situation of immigrant women in our society, we should overcome this victimizing view without ignoring the difficulties of their social condition, but at the same time, recognize their capacity for a social agenda in front of the many obstacles they have encountered. To consolidate a fruitful intercultural dialogue based on mutual respect and diversity, it is necessary to recognize cultural and gender diversity. There has been great progress made since the French revolution. One needs only to see the advances that have allowed women to occupy decisive positions in our society. Nevertheless, there are still many challenges to overcome regarding female subordination, in both our society and globally. The lessons from the past can provide clues to understand the current situation of women and contribute guidelines to better understand the persistence of discriminatory practices and to identify the residual problems we still have to face in order to achieve an effective equality.

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