

Thinking otherwise: theorizing the colonial/modern gender system in Africa.

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Abstract

This article aims to show that there is an entanglement between representations of the body and gender inequalities between the colonial period and contemporary African societies. Postcolonial Africa remains deeply marked by representations of sex, body and gender during colonization. This epistemological stance has the consequence of denying the idea of the end of decolonization, which appears at this moment as a myth. It derives theoretically from the works of the Latin American modernity / coloniality research program. Coloniality is understood as a set of paradigms of domination and regulation of the life of the colonized introduced during the construction of European hegemony around the world since the fifteenth century. Contemporary Discourses and knowledge about gender dynamics remain deeply embedded in Eurocentric thinking. To illustrate this situation, two aspects of life of former colonized seemed to me important to highlight: the inferiorization of women in Africa and gender categories. Even if it is not my point to argue that the situation of women and gays in Africa was better before contacts with Europeans, I am trying to show that the subalternization of women and homosexuals in contemporary Africa can't be account without a deep surgery on the body of colonized people and speeches about sexuality.

Key words: Coloniality; sex; gender; Africa; modernity.

Résumé

Cet article vise à montrer qu'il existe un enchevêtrement entre les représentations du corps et les inégalités de genre entre la période coloniale et les sociétés africaines contemporaines. L'Afrique postcoloniale reste profondément marquée par les représentations du sexe, du corps et du sexe pendant la colonisation. Cette position épistémologique a pour conséquence de nier l'idée de la fin de la décolonisation, qui apparaît en ce moment comme un mythe. Il dérive théoriquement des travaux du programme de recherche latino-américain modernité / colonialité. La colonialité est comprise comme un ensemble de paradigmes de domination et de régulation de la vie des colonisés introduits lors de la construction de l'hégémonie européenne autour du monde depuis le XVI^e siècle. Les discours contemporains et les connaissances sur les dynamiques de genre restent

profondément ancrés dans la pensée eurocentrique. Pour illustrer cette situation, deux aspects de la vie des anciens colonisés m'ont paru importants: l'infériorisation des femmes en Afrique et les catégories de genre. Même si je ne veux pas dire que la situation des femmes et des homosexuels en Afrique était meilleure avant les contacts avec les Européens, j'essaie de montrer que la subalternisation des femmes et des homosexuels en Afrique contemporaine ne peut pas être prise en compte sans une chirurgie profonde. le corps des personnes colonisées et les discours sur la sexualité.

Mots-clés: Colonialité sexe; le genre; Afrique; la modernité.

Introduction

African feminists influenced by liberal and Marxist approaches have long neglected the importance of colonization in the process of transforming gender identities and subalternization of women in Africa. However, contemporary African societies can't be understood outside from the colonial context. Because new african subjectivities and identities have been manufactured by western domination. It is to this exercise of analysis that the thinkers of coloniality invite us. Questioning Eurocentric hegemonic thought, they propose a critique of modernity by apprehending it not as a process of emancipation of individuals, but a dynamic of oppression, subjugation and domination of non-European peoples. Modernity in this perspective rhymes with colonialism and race as essential matrix.

The coloniality of gender allows us to figure the oppression of non-European women in a long process that dates back to the fifteenth century with slavery and which resulted in the nineteenth century to the Europeanization of the planet. This adoption of European hierarchical structures in the colonies will disrupt traditional societies. By racializing and sexualizing bodies, new societies emerged at the end of independence.

In the following lines, I will show from coloniality of gender perspective that the oppression of women in Africa has its roots in the European imperial project inspired by heterosexual patriarchy. New representations of women and sexuality will be introduced on the continent. This Eurocentric vision is now reproduced by the African patriarchy. The consequences are mainly of three orders: a binarization of gender identities around the masculine and feminine, a reduction of the role of women in the private sphere and rejection of homosexuals through institutionalization of heterosexim. Investigating oppression of women and homosexuals in Africa need an articulation of the entanglement between the past and the present.

A. The birth of colonialities

Colonization has been one of the most significant and traumatic events in the history of mankind. It leads to the exploitation, enslavement and even extermination of human

populations across the planet. From the 19th to the 20th century, the peoples of Africa, America and Asia were subjected to European domination. The colonial situation (Balandier, 2001), a moment of encounter between the colonizer and the colonized, led to the emergence of the double complex of dependence and inferiority. Independences of former colonies has erase this situation (Mannoni, 1950). But colonization was not only an economic and military enterprise. It was also a kidnapping of body and mind of the colonized. It strengthen its subjugation and legitimize Western hegemony. The production of discourses and knowledge on the former colonial territories is a decisive factor in the prolongation of colonial domination. Therefore, to think Western domination, to restore the place of the former colonized in history appeared as a necessity in order to allow them to leave the great night (Mbembe, 2010).

In the wake of anti-colonial thinkers such as WEB Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and Aimé Cesaire, the postcolonial studies emerge in the mid-1970s. Edouard Said's, *Orientalism* (1978) can be considered as a founding moment. These theories offer a critique of capitalism, modernity and Western colonialism (Mendoza, 2016). Registered also in what can be considered as "*history from below*" (Chibber, 20013), postcolonial studies have made it possible to perceive the colonized not as a passive agent, but also as having a agency.

Paying particular attention to the power of discourse, subalternists have relied on textual analysis to supplement earlier criticisms of colonialism and capitalism over marginality and subalternity (Chibber, 2013, 8). One of the most influential of this group is Gayatri Spivak. In her text "*Can subaltern speak*", she emphasizes the notion of "epistemic violence" that impede not only the emergence of all specific knowledge about subordinates, but also, shows that any attempt to describe or speak about subordinates allows to consolidate the domination of the West over the former colonized territories (Spivak, 1994). Spivak also points out from Indian society perspective that if in the production of colonial discourse, subordinates have no history and can't speak, women find themselves in an even more uncomfortable position.

But two moments mark what has been called the coloniality and decoloniality turn. First, a fracture appeared between the Latin America Subaltern Studies Group and the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group. The first reproaching the latter that we could not fully understand colonial domination in Asia, America or Africa without separate them in spite of some similarities. Because of the multiplicity of contexts, but also historical trajectories. South Asian Subaltern Studies Group were also accused of referring to much Western epistemology with an important recourse to the works of Gramsci and Foucault (Grosfoguel, 2007, 212). A second break, the most decisive, within the Latin America Subaltern Studies Group. There were two trends. Those who apprehended subalternity as a critique of postmodern thought and thereby inspired by Eurocentric thinkers and those who read it as a decolonial critique (Mignolo 2000: 183-186; 213-214). For the latter, getting locked in Western epistemology limited the radical critique

of Eurocentrism.

These are among the differences that led to the birth of Latin American modernity / coloniality research program. Modernity and coloniality represent two fundamental concepts to understand the experience of domination experienced by people outside the Western world. They also argue that we can't understand modernity without associate it with colonialism. These are two sides of the same coin that form the colonial / modern system (Grosfoguel, 2011).

In order to understand this approach, it is important first of all to make a distinction between colonialism and coloniality. Colonialism refers to a period in the history of the former colonial territories during which their political, economic, military and territorial sovereignty was under the control of the European powers. Coloniality refers to the colonial situation in which the former colonies remain encapsulated in the Eurocentric hegemony despite their independence (Quijano, 1991, 1993, 1998). Regarding the differences between colonialism and coloniality Maldonado-Torres argue that:

"Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on another nation, thereby creating an empire out of that nation. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and everyday" (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243).

We can therefore think that colonialism regulates all aspects of African societies: knowledge, culture, art, economy, including gender relations. It is a relationship of domination maintained by the myth of decolonization in order to consolidate the Euro-American hegemony on a global scale. It allows us to understand the entanglement of old forms of domination and social hierarchies with contemporary forms of oppression, exclusion and marginalization. It is this continuity in the power dynamics between the West and the rest of the world that has been described by Quijano (2000) under the concept of "coloniality of power".

The coloniality of power refers to the structures of power, control and hegemony that have emerged since the conquest of America still today. This is where one of the essential points of the Latin American modernity / coloniality group is located. They retrace modernity not from the 18th century, but since the 15th century with

the Portuguese and Spanish conquests of America, which later led to extermination of Amerindian populations and the birth of black slavery. Thus, through the coloniality of power, Quijano intends to account for the historical process of subalternization of non-European populations but also for the construction of Eurocentric hegemony (Grosfoguel, 2011). Modern thought is nothing other than the result of the process of Europeanisation of the planet begun in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Dussel, 2000).

The cornerstone of this process is the racial codification of the world's population, making Europe and America the center of knowledge and modernity, naming and humiliating the lifestyles of other peoples, while giving negative qualifications (Quijano 2007, Mignolo 1995, Mignolo 2000). Race is the most powerful instrument of control, subjugation and domination invented since 500 years (Quijano, 2007). It has facilitated the construction of categories on the one hand, "Indian", "black", "Asian" (formerly "yellow" and "olive colors"), "white" and "mixed race". On the other hand, America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania.

In this process, the plantation was the founding moment in the making of the subject through slavery and colonialism. At the origin of racial difference, consecrating the process of dehumanization, is the negro. He is not a person, but a separate subject, deportable, reduced to body, flesh, and physical strength. It is *"the Negro slave, the very first subject of race"* (Mbembe, 2014: 257). Race must be seen as the instrument at the heart of the process of constructing the subjectivity of radicalized identities. Thus, we can't now analyze gender inequalities in Africa without inscribing it in relation to the racial factor. Race is the factor that allows black to enter civilization. The racialization and sexualization of the black body is a concomitant process in the colonial enterprise (Fanon, 1952).

Quijano broadens his understanding of the current forms of Eurocentric domination by arguing that the coloniality of power includes: *"Normally, seigniorial relations between dominant and dominated; sexism and patriarchy; the familismo (games of influence based on the family networks), the clientelism, the compadrazgo (cronyism) and the patrimonialism in the relations between the public and the private one and especially between the civil society and the political institutions"* (Quijano, 1994). We can therefore summarize the coloniality of power around four major axes: a) the appropriation of land and the exploitation of labor force. The slavery of the blacks is at the foundation of this process; (b) control of the authority for the permanent exercise of violence against the colonized; c) the control of gender and sexuality. By the institutionalization of heterosexuality d) The control of subjectivity.

The coloniality of power has led to the conceptualization of other forms of coloniality, such as the coloniality of being, which refers to the violation of the meaning of human alterity to the point where the alter-ego becomes a sub-alter (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). The daily life of the colonized *'approximated very closely with situations of war'*. It is a

humanity that is denied (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 257). The colonized world is a world of violence, war, rape, disease, death and mourning. All of them have been denied and they have been reduced under the world of colonialism (Mignolo 2007, Quijano 2007, Grosfoguel 2007, Maldano-Torres 2007, Escobar 2007). We also have the coloniality of knowledge, which illustrates how, through discourses, categories, imagination, we participate to the construction of Eurocentric hegemony (Escobar, 2007).

This theoretical path leads us for the moment to two main conclusions. First, coloniality structures the organization of life, power, and sexuality in contemporary societies. Steve Martinot, sums up the situation pretty well in these terms:

"We all live within a multiplicity of colonialities; subjected in both body and mind. It is not only our labor, but our relations; it is not only the wars, the mass murder and death squads organized by imperialist classes, nor the sub-colonies formed by women, African American communities, or ethnic identities; it is also the hegemonic mind, the white, or masculine, gold heterosexist, gold national chauvinist mind that is constituted by coloniality. [...]. We so face the question of who we are in this mirror. The power of coloniality structure of control, is that it speaks for us so forcefully that we see no recourse but to represent it, to uphold its existence, to ratify its dispensing with ethics and sanctity of human life in everything we say and do as labor and resource" (Martinot, No. 1).

For that reason, Jack Goody defines the coloniality of power as *"a theft of the history of Africans"* (Goody, 2006: 1). The second conclusion is that coloniality makes possible to describe the *"invisible government"* (Bernays, 2007) as racialized, colonial, capitalist, patriarchal, hierarchical, heteronormative, neo-liberal hegemonic and Euro-American (Mignolo 1995, Mignolo 2000, Quijano 2000, Grosfoguel 2007, Grosfoguel 2011;).

B. Sexim, woman and coloniality of gender in Africa

Two observations, however, seem important when reading the works and approaches on coloniality of power. Although sexuality and gender are necessary for the construction of hegemony, they are not the central element which is race. On the other hand, gender, race and class are hierarchical in the epistemology of domination. This is one of the first problem posed by the coloniality of power in relation to gender issues. As Anne McClintock has demonstrated from the study of British colonialism, it is impossible to separate race, gender, and class in the understanding of the imperial process. These variables represent the same facet of one of a project and are therefore inseparable (Crenshaw, 1989).

McClintock points out that the enterprise of possession and domination can't really be account without a deep incursion into power dynamics around gender. She states that: "*imperialism can not be fully understood without a theory of gender power. Gender power was not the superficial patina of empire, a decisive mechanics of class or race. Rather, gender dynamics were, from the outset, fundamental to the securing and maintenance of the imperial enterprise*" (McClintock, 1995, pp. 6-7).

On this basis, masculinity and femininity must be understood within the framework of power dynamics as well as social roles attributed to sex. For a long time, Western feminism has been blind to race in the analysis of women's oppression. This situation can be explained by its propensity to homogenize the female category on a global scale without taking into account the diversity of experiences (Mohanty, 1984). But also, African feminists by rallying mainly the liberal and Marxist perspectives have also helped to standardize the African woman condition (Sow, Iman, Mama, 2004).

However, if we contest the homogeneity of the oppression of women, given the lived experiences that are different according to periods, spaces, racial categorizations does not aim only to account the construction of subalternization, but also how subjectivity is constructed. It is to this intellectual investment that Maria Lugones has given herself. From an intersectional approach, she has theorized the coloniality of gender which aims to understand the oppression of men towards women, but more specifically the domination of the racialized man on women (Lugones, 2007).

Lugones first assumes Quijano's approach that patriarchy and heterosexuality are constitutive elements of imperialism used to control production and sexuality (Lugones, 2007). But it is also this analytical aspect of coloniality of power that is at the center of his criticism. For Lugones, Quijano assumes the instituted biological differences and gender roles as acquired and not as social constructed. This is not entirely false when you read Quijano's work. For him, sexuality serves economic power. This view raises two issues. Firstly, even though they were also oppressed at different degrees by white men, we should recognize that white women were also victims of the oppression of the white heterosexual patriarchy (Stoler, 1989). Secondly, he legitimizes the binary conception of sexuality and thereby heteronormativity. Quijano is also blind to sexual dimorphism, which is a cultural reality of Latin America and even in Africa before the arrival of Europeans (Gun, 1986).

The discourse on the oppression of women in Africa is always generalizing, as if women have same social class and experience same men oppression. Women have different trajectories and roles, and like we will see further, colonization has influenced patriarchy on the continent (Hutchful, 2006). This could be seen at two levels: the affirmation of the biological inferiority of women and in some societies the destruction of social relations has led to the subordination of women. Thus, to think about the oppression of women in Africa despite independence is also to articulate the impact of colonial domination on racialized bodies.

Sexism and patriarchy as well as race are at the foundation of the international capitalist structure. These are processes that were simultaneously articulated against the colonized and enslaved peoples. They are, moreover, at the heart of the social and political order during the slavery in America. Bell Hook (1981) demonstrates that the biologisation of the african body in a eugenic perspective dates back to the crossing between white men and slaves, but also between black men and black women (Hook, 1981, 30). This separation continues in America through the organization of a racial hierarchy combined with sexual differentiation. For example, in 1664, the state of Maryland in the United States introduced the first law prohibiting the mixing of race with an emphasis on gender. The text states: "*whatsoever freeborn woman shall intermarry with any slave, from and after the last day of the present assembly, shall serve the masters of such slaves during the life of her husband and that all of them, their fathers were*" (ibid., 31).

Thus, even if we tend to describe in a homogeneous way the experience of slavery, it remains that the social hierarchies during this period placed women at the bottom of the social scale compared to black men. Thus, they suffered from a triple oppression. Oppression from the white man, the white woman, and the black man. A context of oppression that was prolonged and accentuated with the colonial period. The black man, dehumanized, is inferiorized by the white man who removes his status of a man (Fanon, 1952, 1). He is also humiliated in front of the black woman who becomes the possession of white man. We can argue that in postcolony women's oppression is also linked to the desire of former colonized black men to reproduce or enjoy the female body without resistance. Despite the fact that race is a source of violence, which can constitute its "cursed part", the colony also had "a little secret": the pleasure given by the authority and capacity to enjoy women body (Mbembe, 2006).

The coloniality of gender allows us to surround the contemporary oppression of women in Africa in a long period. Then, it is important to analyze the discourses that have been produced to understand the implementation of norms and the processes of control, surveillance and domination (Foucault, 1976). In the imperial discourse on Africa, the animalisation and the dehumanization of the populations in general, goes with the sexualization of the continent. Africa is described mainly as a woman. The imperial project itself is imagined as a way of taking possession of the woman. We can see there a certain eroticization of the colonial enterprise.

The body of the woman and the frame of the reproduction were part of the matrix of the imagination of the white man from the beginning of the expansion. In a letter to his family in 1492, Christopher Columbus pointed out that former sailors who had gone off to discover the world had made a mistake in thinking that the earth was round. Instead, he points out that the earth has a woman's chest, with a protuberance on its summit in the unmistakable form of a nipple - to which it slowly navigated (McClintock, 1995). This image of the woman developed by Christopher Columbus in the 15th century reflects her infantilization, the biologization of woman body and at the same time a desire for appropriation by the male subject.

This vision will extend over Africa until the 20th century to justify the colonial enterprise. The feminization of Africa will continue through authors such as Margerite Steen who writes: *“Africa is a woman, a dark devastating witch of a woman, coiling herself around you like a snake, making you forget everything but her burning breasts listen to the drums of Africa reminding every man of things he forgot ... when he left his mothers womb (1941: 319)“*.

What must also be read behind these images produced by the discourses is the invisibilization of men on the continent. Therefore, the black man is not simply dehumanized, but also made invisible. In the highly patriarchal and heterosexist colonial European society, the production of such a discourse tends to normalize conquest (Mama, 2006). African woman need to be protected by white men. Hypersexualized, they are considered great seductresses and could also serve as providers of sex to the white colon. Moreover, the texts to justify this need are not lacking.

“One is suddenly aware of the immense fecundity and sexuality of Africa. Many of the women were beautiful when you used to African beauty. One could see why they were all women. They were in a sense without souls. They were bold and without innocence. They said with their dark eyes; we are women. You are a man. We know what you want (Cloete, 1958, 51)“

“The girls and women [of Africa] know that speech is not-of their business. They do what they are told. They fix their sleepy eyes on the speaker and allow their usual trains of feelings to continue (Cary, 1961: 170)“.

The African woman is thus deprived of any capacity to exercise in the public sphere. If sex plays a central role in its definition, through the satisfaction of men's sexual needs, its work is limited to the fields, preparing food and take care of children. Although today this discourse seems outdated in academic arenas (Kisiang'ani, 2004), it remains true that the social roles attributed to women in many African societies remain confined to the private sphere. What is important to underline in order to illustrate the entanglement of the imaginary around sexual inequality is that the colonial state, just as the project itself is a state controlled by men. As a consequence, *“in many places this exclusively masculine, colonial administrative and bureaucratic apparatus got rid of precolonial systems which, although different by gender, had political functions and titles of importance and influence diverse for both women and men“* (Mama, 2006). It is partly on this basis that coloniality of gender also interrogate the construction of categories.

C. Contesting categories

If Eurocentric historiography traces back to colonization from the nineteenth century, coloniality locates it rather from the fifteenth century. As a starting point for gender inequality, Lugones indicates that gender is a social construction as well as race. In the

colonial enterprise, the bodies of men and women are racialized and sexualized for the purpose of consolidating domination, but also for the distribution of social roles. In many non-European societies, colonization has had the effect of structuring the difference between men and women and establishing male hegemony and the subordination of women in all aspects of life (Lugones, 2007). The new social hierarchies introduced by colonization seem to have destroyed the systems of solidarity and complementarity that existed in so-called “primitive» societies before the European conquest. Thus, according to Mendoza, *“Through sexual violence, exploitation, and systems of cohabitation, the colonizers used to break the will of indigenous men and women, imposing new hierarchies that were institutionalized with colonialism. The bodies of women became the land on which the country negotiated under new conditions“* (Mendoza, 2016).

There is in fact behind this critique of the impact of colonization on gender identities, a thought that, it is the normalization of patriarchy in African societies by colonization that has consecrated the oppression of women in Africa. Patriarchy can be defined as: *“a family-social, ideological, political system in which men- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or not not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male“* (Rich, 1977, 57). This is a broad definition that allows us to grasp all the ideological contours surrounding this notion. Patriarchy is an ancient social and political organization of societies that existed in many forms (Bennet, 1989, 261).

But patriarchy was not the main political and social organization in Africa before colonization (Amaduime, 1997). There have been many matriarchal societies where women held important roles and constituted the balance of society. The hegemony of patriarchy has its roots in Indo-European nomadic culture before spreading on a planetary scale (Diop, 1989). Diop argued that in precolonial Africa there was no transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, since the social structure was essentially matriarchal in the sense of female rule, female transmission of property and descent, and man being the mobile element in marriage or sexual union (Amaduime, 1997, 74). The changes occurred in Africa with the Arab-Muslim conquest and the European colonization (Diop, 1987).

The theorists on decolonial feminism argue that in pre-colonial societies, gender differences were more complex and not simply based on biology. But even if we do not have to standardize the scale of oppression of European women, we can't forget to emphasize that the physical traits supported by the biblical discourse helped to consolidate patriarchy. A situation that helped to lock European women into the domestic role and make them the pillar of the family. The ideology of motherhood which rend women as the main culprit in the failure or success of children must be seen as an essential variable in affirming the domination of the European patriarchate.

The first consequence of the ideology of motherhood is to make the nuclear family the starting point of any social structure. A family that revolves around the father, mother

and children. The traditional African family goes beyond this sphere and is defined much more by kinship rather than marriage. In the European conception, the organization of the family makes the woman responsible for the household. But, moreover, the ideology of motherhood consecrates the hegemony of heterosexuality and makes the other gender invisible. It can therefore be emphasized that discourses and representations in contemporary Africa of women as property of the man or responsible for the family and homosexuality as nonexistent in Africa are colonial legacy.

This last aspect on homosexuality is quite interesting because Africa is categorized as a homophobic continent. Homosexuality is perceived as a western import. Before the arrival of European settlers, same-sex relations have been recognized in several African societies (Hoad, 2007). The binary conception of sexuality was practically non-existent. The prohibition of homosexuality stemmed from a desire to normalize heterosexuality. The mechanics of power claiming to repress homosexuals has a relationship between people of the same sex, meaning and a name. Homosexuality has become an analytical reality, visible and permanent (Foucault, 1976, 60). We can therefore see homosexuality rather as a colonial invention. But the Eurocentric and antihomosexual postcolonial discourse replicates the colonial paradigm on sexuality, which has made invisible relations between people of the same sex and institutionalized the binary conception of sexuality. From where I share this concern of Allotey on the categories:

“ can ‘western’ labels be appropriately used in African contexts? Why do participants refuse such label? Is it for the fear of been persecuted? It also raises the question of labelling sexual identities as individuals who do not fit into what is viewed as ‘normal heterosexuality’ are seen as deviance. What is considered deviant often attracts negative stereotypes as in the case of homosexuality » (Allotey, 2015, p19).

Oyewumi Oyeronke is engaged in this deconstruction of categories. The woman category according to her would be a colonial invention (Oyeronke, 1997). Asserting that colonization in Africa, although violent, has a different impact on men and women, she explains this difference mainly by the fact that the colonizers were white men. The colonial state is therefore, first, a patriarchal state. Despite the presence in the colonies of white women, although oppressed, enjoyed the privilege of the race. But power and authority were exclusively concentrated in hands of white men. Hellen Callaway analyzes the situation of the Colonial Service, which was built for the purpose of governing people as: *“a male institution in all its aspects: its” masculine “ideology, its military organization and processes, its rituals of power and hierarchy, its strong boundaries between the sexes. It would have been “unthinkable” in the belief system, which had had to become recognized for their important “feminine” work (Callaway, 1987, 5-6).). Ashis Nandy describes this situation by the fact that colonial practices stemmed from “a world view which believes in the absolute superiority of the human over the nonhuman and the sub human, the masculine over the feminine ..., and the modern or progressive over the traditional or the savage” (Nandy, 1983).*

Lugones' approach on coloniality is inspired by Oyeronke's work, which highlights the fact that gender does not exist in some traditional African societies, especially Yoruba society before colonization. The binary conception of gender identities was introduced by the European settler. Oyeronke emphasizes that gender has become important in Yoruba studies of Yoruba life because Yoruba life, past and present, has been translated into English to fit the western pattern of body-reasoning (Oyeronke, 1997, 30). Yoruba society was guided by other principles, such as seniority, which were the mechanisms for exercising authority and power.

For Oyeronke, *“researchers always find gender when they look for” (1997, 31).* Before specifying: *“The usual gloss of the Yoruba categories obinrin and okunrin as” female / woman “and male / man,” respectively, is a mistranslation. These categories are neither binally nor hierarchical “(1997, 32-33).* The prefixes obin and okun specify a variety of anatomy. Oyewumi translates the prefixes as referring to the anatomical and anatomical female, shortened as anamal and anafemal. It is important to note that it does not understand these categories as binary opposed (Lugones, 2008).

This perspective poses the problem of signs and meanings given to categories. Eyes from which we observe a society build our representations. Thus, soaked within the Eurocentric gaze that promotes a binary conception of gender identities, colonial anthropologists have apprehended Yoruba society from the male and female categories, assigning them roles that in their eyes seemed similar to those occupied by women in the European society. This is why Oyeronke thinks that the woman in Africa is a colonial manufacture.

Oyeronke sums up his thought in these terms:

“ The very process by which females have been categorized and reduced to “women made ineligible for leadership roles. The emergence of women as an identifiable category, defined by their anatomy and subordinated to men in all situations, resulted, in part, from the imposition of a patriarchal colonial state. For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. The creation of “women” has a role in the colonial state. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was unthinkable for the colonial government to recognize female leaders among the colonized, such as the Yoruba (...) The transformation of state power to male-gender power is accomplished by the exclusion of women from state structures. This was in sharp contrast to Yoruba state organization, in which power was not gender-determined“ (Oyeronke, 1997, 124-125).

However, It is important here, to note that Oyeronke's work can't be applied to the entire African continent, whose cultural realities are manifold. Even within Yoruba society, Segato (2001), even though she recognizes that the traditional gender system is more complex than the one we have today, she highlights the existence of gender difference but less oppressive than those imposed by European colonization. But she partially joins Oyeronke in pointing out that Yoruba patriarchy has been strengthened under colonization. But it is this hierarchical system of domination that persists until today.

Then, the colonality of gender allows us to grasp the continuity of gender relations and representation of sexuality in Africa. The contemporary binary conception of sex and the hierarchy of gender relations could be perceived as an extension of Eurocentric thought. The contestation of the use of the term postcolonial makes sense here and would simply be a myth (Grosfoguel 2007: 219). This is why Gayatri Chakravorty prefers the use of the term “neo-colonized post-colonial world” to better capture the extension of the capitalist system of power and domination (Spivak, 1990, 166).

Conclusion

At the end of this reflection, it can be emphasized that the new gender system introduced by colonization, consecrating the superiority of men over women was accepted by men in Africa who took advantage of new social hierarchies despite racial oppression. Even if we can't extend Oyewumi's analysis to all African societies, it remains that colonization has influenced gender identities on the continent. These dynamics of inequalities continue today and are characterized by the domination of patriarchy, the inequality between men and women and homophobia. However, although many studies have established the crucial place of women in the functioning of precolonial societies, the plurality of gender identities before contact with Europeans, it appears that colonization through the process of racialization and sexualization of bodies, institutionalization of male domination has led to a decline of women's status and repression of homosexuals. The continuation of this situation today despite the end of colonialism attests the entanglement between the colonial and the postcolonial in the dynamics of gender in contemporary Africa. But what could also seem interesting to deepen, is the process of domestication by the colonized, instruments used by the colonizer, to consolidate and establish his hegemony over women in contemporary Africa.

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