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Nuances of Feminism and Gender Studies in European and Latin American Communication Research

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The two chapters in this section provide us with informative accounts of the historical development and current status of gender media studies in Latin America and Europe. They responded in different and positive ways to the original proposal for this section. Originally, the editors of the volume envisaged the feminist section to explore the theoretical roots and practical implications of feminist (media) research in both regions. The authors from Latin America, specifically from Brazil, framed their historical account with the relationship between feminist efforts of scholars and social movements throughout the region. The authors from Europe, specifically from Portugal and Spain, explained the development of feminist and gender studies in the Iberian Peninsula from a more institutional perspective.

From these different perspectives, the chapters make important contributions to the historicization of feminism and gender studies in both regions. Admittedly, the specificity in sub-regions in Latin America and Europe reduces the regional analysis of the chapters. Also, the focus on the development of gender studies in both regions turn the “theoretical roots” and epistemological innovations into another shortcoming. Nevertheless, the chapters compensate with detailed descriptions of the intersections between gender studies, social movements (Latin America) and policy-making institutions (Europe). It means that the authors respond to another editorial expectation to this section: that the chapters also evaluated the role of gender within the horizon of global justice and micro and macro forms of individual, collective and institutional empowerment of feminist thinking and practice inside and outside the academia.

In this synthesis chapter, our goal is to identify and explore differences and similarities between the texts. The idea is not only to compare but also to expand the discussion in ways to deepen the scope

of the texts and to identify paths for further regional collaboration and exchange. For that purpose, we divide this chapter into thematic sections derived from the reading and discussions between the authors throughout the editorial process, from text submission, to review, re-writing and dialogue. First, we reflect on how both chapters “feminism” and “gender” differs from one another in the region. Second, we discuss the different political approaches to feminist and gender media studies in the region. What explains the emphasis in scholar-social movement relationship in the Latin American chapter and the scholar-policy relationship in the European chapter? Third, we compare the different status of feminist and gender media studies in Brazil, where they are marginalized, and in the Iberian Peninsula, where they are consolidated. Fourth, we raise two issues that did not appear in the chapters: the de-colonial critique and discussions on intersectionality. Finally, we identify existing spaces, and others suggest possible routes for transatlantic collaboration in feminist and gender media studies.

Feminist struggles, gender studies

One of the similarities between the chapters is how they establish their focus by differentiating “feminism” from “gender”. In Latin American analysis, the authors explain how gender studies consist of a multi- and interdisciplinary field born within the previously existing relationship between academia and the feminist struggles in the region. They also describe how – from the dynamic relationship between the university and social movements – the notion of gender rose both to define a theoretical position of the field and to expand the object of studies beyond the men-women binary. A similar process happened in Portugal and Spain according to the European chapter. The authors describe how, until the 1990s, most of the studies about inequalities between men and women in communication used different labels, but most of these studies focused on women. In the 1990s, they explain, the concept of gender and the field of gender studies gained strength and diversity both in terms of objects and in terms of scholars and researchers.

In both cases, feminism appears as an ideological and political force propelling gender studies. This distinction possibly relates to the multifaceted conceptualization of feminism combined with the value of the specificity of the notion of gender. In very broad terms, feminism represents different sets of values, thoughts, writings and actions against or concerning various forms of abuses, inequalities and violence

women have historically experienced all over the world (Schneir, 1972; Kemp & Squires, 1997). Much of what characterizes feminism as actions preceded and to some extent go beyond the concept, whose clear-cut definition is troublesome because of its nuanced ideological, theoretical and political-pragmatic boundaries (Beasley, 1999). Some authors refer to *feminisms*, in the plural, for believing that “there is no unchanging feminist orthodoxy, no settled feminist conventions, no static feminist analysis. Feminism is diverse, and it is dynamic” (Kemp and Squires 1997, 12). In all this, feminism - as theory and practice - has been a defining and inspiring force to different contested and contesting sociopolitical movements, cultural phenomena, policy-making processes and scholarly paradigms related to the constitution and experiences of gender relations in predominantly patriarchal societies.

More specifically, the two texts reproduced, albeit inadvertently, a rather typical differentiation between “feminist media studies” and “gender media studies”. In their critical overview of feminist and gender media studies, Kaitlynn Mendes and Cynthia Carter (2008) make a distinction that essentially appears in both chapters. They argue that

“as such, feminist scholarly research is inseparable from activist forms of feminism. On the other hand, gender studies are not implicitly political in the sense of having an agenda for social change based on gender equality. Instead, the principal aim has been one of raising awareness about the ways in which gender affects individual life choices and chances, and thus women’s and men’s relative personal opportunities for personal and career success” (p. 1702).

The difference between the chapters and this quotation is that the authors demonstrated how the feminist-political force remains strong in gender media studies in Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula.

Political Aspects of Gender Studies

The political aspect of gender studies in both chapters is visible in the relationship between gender studies and social movements and policy-making institutions, respectively in Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula.

In the Brazilian/Latin American case, the authors describe how academic environments have been important spaces for knowledge and experience exchanges for the development of the feminist struggles in the region. They argue that it was in these spaces of exchange between the academia and social movements that studies about women, sexuality and gender developed. The authors also briefly raise the issue that the heterogeneity of class, race and decolonization in the region also contributed to the diverse character of the Latin American feminism. The authors also indicate the existence of a more recent process of NGO-ization of feminist struggles. These three aspects - the ties between the university and social movements, the diverse character of struggles and the recent NGO-ization of feminist struggles - reflect processes of change, which have affected social movements in general in the region (Alvarez, Dagnino, & Escobar, 1998; Dagnino, 2010).

In the Iberian/European case, the political aspect of gender media studies has been what the authors define as “institutionalization of equality”. It means that gender studies have found its way within the institutional spheres of policy-making in the context of the European Union. Both in the cases of Spain and Portugal, the authors argue that gender studies have become objects of governmental effort. This institutional interest relates to the investments and support, especially by socialist governments, to promote the investigations meant to support equality-related policies.

The two cases demonstrate how the post-dictatorial experiences in feminism and gender studies differed between the two regions. This situation helps explain why the status of gender media studies can be so different between Brazil/Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula/Europe.

Marginality and Development

One of the striking regional differences highlighted in the two chapters is the status of gender media studies in the Brazilian and Iberian Peninsula. While the Brazilian case indicates that gender media studies are still marginal in the Latin American field of communication research, the opposite happens in Europe, where gender media studies have begun a process of consolidation.

On the one hand, in the case of Brazil, the authors present their mapping of academic publication databases to demonstrate how

there is little research on gender among Brazilian and other Latin American communication scholars. They show that even though Brazil has journals in which feminist media studies are published, especially interdisciplinary journals, gender media studies still lacks disciplinary weight in the country. However, the authors emphasize that interdisciplinarity alone does not explain the marginality of gender media studies. For them, one reason is the fact that the Latin American field of communication research has tight professional and ideological ties with the media, communication and journalism professions. For this reason, communication research tends to focus on more professional, institutional and market-oriented aspects than to those related to gender. Younger generations have increasingly been interested in gender media studies, they remark, but its disciplinary and paradigmatic marginality remains a problem.

On the other hand, the authors of the Iberian/European case argue from the outset that the field of gender and communication studies is increasing in terms of academic interest in the region. They illustrate this claim by referring to key publications since the 1970s. They also demonstrate how approaches to the situation of women in European media organizations have been conducted. As reasons for the increase in academic interest of gender media studies in Europe, the authors indicated that the processes of democratization and the regional integration under the European Union led to what they call “globalization of equality policies”, referring to how societies adopted homogenizing EU-policies. Another factor that influenced the development of gender media studies in Europe was the development of ICTs, which also contributed to the formation of networks and encounters, leading to the development of a diverse field of research.

Decoloniality and Intersectionality

One aspect that we raised in the collective discussion for this chapter is that of de-coloniality and intersectionality. Neither of the chapters deals with how the increasing proliferation of voices of Black, Indigenous and other people from racial and ethnic groups in society and specifically in gender debates. Therefore, we reflected together on two questions: (a) How does the increasing establishment of black and indigenous feminist voices have affected the development of feminism and gender studies in the region? (b) How do you evaluate the ‘intersectional situation’ of feminism/gender in research, policy and social movements in the region?

In response, the authors of each chapter described the current situation of de-coloniality and intersectionality in the contexts they are most familiar with. Among the European colleagues, the perception is that these debates have not yet clearly entered the fields of communication and gender studies in either Portugal or Spain. However, some studies focused on the representation and visibility of Black women, on racism, on the anti-Romani attitudes and behaviours already raise these questions.

For the Brazilian colleagues, there have been an increase of Black, mixed-race and indigenous people from lower-income public education in the university system due to recent affirmative action policies. This phenomenon has led to intense interest and adherence to de-colonial theories. In practice, this means the privileging of Latin American authors like Maria Lugones, Anibal Quijano, Walter D Mignolo, Viveiros de Castro. Also, authors who question white feminism have also made contributions to the intersectional feminism studies. For example, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, Ella Shohat, Kymberlé Crenshaw, Avtar Brah. Specifically, in the Brazilian relationship with Brazilian authors, there has been a renewed wave of textual production by and about different generations of Black feminist writers both in academic (e.g. Lélia Rodrigues, Luiza Barrios and Djamila Ribeiro) and in literary (e.g. Carolina Maria de Jesus and Conceição Evaristo). These authors have written about the intersections of class, race, gender and generations in Brazilian academic writings and literature.

Conclusion: Possible Routes for Transatlantic Collaboration

The two chapters discussed in this section are important first steps towards a broader discussion on gender media studies in Latin America, in Europe and most importantly in the possible exchanges and collaborations between researchers in both regions. Based on the discussions which have led to the original and the synthesis chapters, it is important to think about (at least) two questions: How to identify and explore different ways through which to deepen debates about feminist and gender media studies in the Latin American and European fields of communication research? How to build bridges of collaboration across the Atlantic to empower feminist and gender studies in both regions?

Regarding the first question, it is important to move beyond the

necessary historicizing of feminist and gender media studies and instead review and develop them in their contemporary, existing features. In this case, feminist and gender media studies need to be thought in paradigmatic, socio-historical, radical-political and cultural terms. In terms of paradigm, it is necessary to reflect on how the contributions of feminist and gender media studies can contribute and change the overarching field of communication research. Today, for example, we think of “feminism” as a theoretical and methodological paradigm which influences multiple disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Can we envisage a similar kind of influence from feminist and gender *media* studies? Both chapters have indicated areas and themes that have been explored through the gender question in communication research. However, the question about methodological and conceptual advancements remains open.

Perhaps the path to more substantial contributions to the field of communication research lies in the everlasting and interchangeable socio-historical, radical-political and cultural values of feminist and gender media research. The development of information and communication technologies has not led to the improvement of the situation of women and LGBTQ communities across the world. However, the global character of resistance movements such as the Pride Parades, Slutwalks and *#niunamenos* is evidence that the struggles against individual and structural *machismo* and patriarchal power have gained strength in the interconnectedness allowed by online and mobile technologies. As intrinsically communication phenomena, they appear as opportunities for feminist and gender media studies to search for innovations which both explain these phenomena in scholarly debates, but also contribute to those same struggles it aims at understanding. Contributions that complement each other – the one based on the social movement knowledge acquired in Latin America and the institutional one as European scholars have developed. It leads to the second question: the global situation of women and LGBTQ communities not only create the perfect condition for transatlantic collaboration but actually needs the contributions feminist and gender media scholars of Latin America and Europe can make together.

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