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To cite this article: Sonia Reverter | (2022) Epistemologies of violence against women. A proposal from the South, Cogent Social Sciences, 8:1, 2038356, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2022.2038356](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2038356)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2038356>



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Published online: 15 Feb 2022.



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Received: 22 November 2021
Accepted: 01 February 2022

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Reviewing editor:
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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Epistemologies of violence against women. A proposal from the South

Sonia Reverter*

Abstract: The focus of this research is to consider the following questions: Are we using the appropriate conceptual framework in order to understand and terminate the practice of control and violence against women? What epistemic change do we need to understand the systemic violence against women? In order to answer these questions, we will take a look at the dominant epistemic framework—the one called “Western”—to highlight its deficiencies. The proposal will take the usefulness and efficiency of the so-called “epistemology of the South” as formulated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Rita Segato. One of the most important conclusions of this research will lead us to propose intersectional feminism as a feminism able to overcome the epistemological barriers and colonial practices that still exist today. The proposal of an epistemology of the South is presented as a useful logical alliance of an intersectional vision of feminisms that may allow us to understand and transform the reality of violence against women.

Subjects: Gender Studies; Latin American & Hispanic Studies; Gender Studies - Soc Sci; Philosophy; Cultural Studies

Keywords: Feminist epistemologies; violence against women; gender violence; intersectional feminism; feminism from the South

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Ph.D. in Philosophy. Department of Philosophy and Sociology. Director of Instituto Universitario de Estudios Feministas y de Género (Universitat Jaume I). Invited scholar from universities and research centers: Berkeley (USA), University of San Francisco (USA), Gender Institute (London School of Economics), Centre for Civil Society (London School of Economics), Centro de Investigaciones Filosóficas (Buenos Aires), Instituto Interdisciplinario de Estudios de Género (Universidad de Buenos Aires). My research is mainly focused on feminist theory, especially on the new challenges of the feminist agenda. My goal is to capture the new claims, needs and proposals carried out by feminisms. The intention of this is articulating a philosophical reflection committed to an emancipating transformation of the world. In this regard, there is always an idea of a theory as a political commitment in all my works, be gender violence, as this one, or my other works on cyberfeminism, neurosexism, feminist philosophy, post-gender, transhumanism.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Are we using the appropriate conceptual framework in order to terminate the practice of control and violence against women? Maybe we are not applying the right epistemic framework to understand this type of violence. What epistemic change do we need to understand the nature of gender violence? The proposal of an epistemology of the South is presented as a useful logical alliance of an intersectional vision of feminisms that may allow us to understand and transform the reality of violence against women. Authors such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Rita Segato are the ones this article follow in order to present a feminism able to overcome the epistemological barriers and colonial practices that still exist today.

1. Introduction

Western feminist theory has produced not only a terminological framework for understanding gender oppression, but also a conceptual framework to understand how it can be transformed the materiality of that oppression and move closer to a more egalitarian and just social reality (Code, 2014; Phelan, 2017). This conceptual framework, however, is usually thought and developed in relation to the experiences and realities in which it emerges, in the cultures of the Northern Hemisphere, mainly from the European and American continents (and mainly in English language). This fact is not trivial, since a theory, like the feminist one that seeks to understand and transform material reality, can hardly be applied as an explanatory theory in a universal way (Zaragocin & Caretta, 2021). That is why this research studies the importance of a proper epistemic framework in order to understand and transform violence against women. This violence is, no doubt, a universal fact, though it is not possible to understand it if we do not consider the differences intersecting such violence (Basilio et al., 2021). The idea, then, is to propose a broad framework with enough epistemic capacity to understand the diverse ways in which the different forms of violence (in plural) against women (in plural) take place.

2. North and South beyond geographies

In this article, we will use the nomenclature that the famous Brandt Report's outlined in the 1980s (Brandt, 1980) to refer to the North as the rich hemisphere and the South as the impoverished one. Although they have been partly rejected for simplifying a reality that is not altogether like that (Das, 2017), we will use this terminology herein as we believe that, when speaking of epistemologies and not only of geographic and socioeconomic realities, it is understood that the epistemology of the North corresponds to the classic epistemology created in the West during Modernity and practiced in a colonial fashion all around the world. On the other hand, the epistemology of the South will be related to a proposal that originated mostly in Latin America and which proposes a global outreach that may put an end to the pyramidal model of knowledge of the epistemology of the North (Connell, 2014, 2015).

Both epistemic models have defined geographic and historic origins although only the one from the North has global control and power. It is necessary to take such global development into account when speaking of the North and the South in this article, since their scope of action is not limited to a local geographic area. The epistemology of the North is carried out in geographic areas of the South, just as the epistemology of the South is carried out in places of the North. Therefore, they refer to models and ways of thinking and practicing knowledge. The epistemology of the North has certainly a long history which is mainly linked to Modernity. Its hegemony has not been contended with until the close of the 20th century. The epistemology of the South was created as critical response to the abovementioned one. It is thus linked to liberation and emancipation theories and movements. One of these movements is feminism (or feminisms in plural). For feminisms, the question of how knowledge obtained, understood, validated and justified is critical. For this reason, although Western feminist theory has offered a starting point for any feminist movement in the world, its application cannot be automatically validated. Let us also remember that producing theoretical categories is a fundamental part of the task of transformation and emancipation, as many authors indicate (Bhabha, 1994; Dussel, 1992; Escobar, 2007; Mignolo, 2010; Quijano, 1992; Segato, 2003; De Sousa Santos, 2002).

Since the 1980s, feminist theory has conducted a thorough epistemic criticism where it has developed diverse epistemic theories (Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Anderson, 2020). All these different theoretical standpoints converge in an urgent demand to dismantle the structure that organizes the dominant knowledge in practices that generate inequality and create disadvantage for women. According to the whole of epistemic feminist theories, the most important element to dismantle a Western (and patriarchal) epistemology is acknowledging the fact that there is no neutral point of

view in knowledge, that every knowledge is situated (Ashton & McKenna, 2020). However, despite having this point in common, the differences between feminist epistemologies are considerable.

This article does not pretend to analyze these different proposals but to understand what conceptual epistemic framework organizes such dominant structure in knowledge. To this end, the proposal departs from the idea that there are two main conceptual frameworks that may be useful to understand the epistemic backdrop of the subject of study—violence against women. It gathers both frameworks in the following way: the modern Western epistemic framework and what it is called here the framework of the “epistemologies of the South.” Although feminist theory departs from the modern basis of knowledge, it has stressed the need to overcome its own contradictions when it has pointed out its mistakes and inconsistencies. If it is understood that Modernity is not some sort of cohesive “totality”, responsible for Europe’s colonial legacy then it is clear that Modernity is a fractured process and feminist criticism is, in itself, part of such process (Dean & Aune, 2015). Hence, it will be important to see what it can or cannot be salvaged from that process in order to form an epistemic framework that may help us understand violence against women. During the analysis here, the criticism of Modernity from the epistemologies of the South will be the point of departure.

This analysis develops around the theoretical framework of decolonial theory and has a meaningful connection with the criticism that was mainly conducted by postcolonial feminism in Latin America. The key authors chosen for this study are Boaventura de Sousa Santos as a representative of criticism against the epistemic imposition of the West, and Rita Segato, as a theorist who proposes the invention and application of new categories to understand the mechanics of patriarchy in Latin America. The thesis is that, unless the feminism of the South does not produce its own categories and concepts, the colonizing mission shall be perpetuated through the feminist theory. With this, the “unnamed hierarchies” that Segato (2018) defines—which are quite present in violence against women in the Latin American context—are replicated. This theoretical framework may also help to understand how the very hegemonic Western feminist theory may not only be deficient to understand the reality of the violence against women in Latin America, but to understand that violence in contexts in western countries which mutes ethnical and racial questions. This has been pointed out, not only by non-Western scholars, but by critical scholars of the white Western framework, such as Crenshaw (1989), Crenshaw (1991), 2012) or hooks (1984).¹

3. Feminist epistemologies: Why choose the epistemology of the South?

3.1. Epistemology of modernity

Feminist theory has consolidated a critique of the vision of Modernity as the framework to understand the political proposal of feminist movements. Although the framework of Enlightenment is, according to many authors, the spark that set the struggle for equality in motion, this is no reason for feminist theory to accept the arguments of the “internal logic” of Modernity. In other words, to think that the very logic of Modernity will free all the subjects and not just the wealthy, land-owning, white man who has been legitimized for centuries.

Western feminist theory has been criticized with that idea. As; Phillips (2018a, 2018b) stated, the thesis that Modernity has an internal logic of equality needs to explain why then continuous struggles have been necessary to approach reality to equality. It is hard to think that, without the resolve and perseverance of the feminist struggle, the egalitarian ideal of emancipation of Modernity and its “internal logic” would have brought any changes to women. The ways of particular struggles, the proclamations at different times of feminist agendas, tell us about a social imaginary which has little in common with a logic of equality in Modernity. If after more than 300 years of Modernity (Dussel, 1992) there still are scenarios of ongoing violence, domination and abuse towards women in every area of life, is it plausible to still think that Modernity has equality as a principle and internal logic?

Although this question is not the core of the debate presented here, it helps us illustrate how feminist theory has needed to become quite critical so as to undo such vision of Modernity as a framework that can be exported to all the exclusions, all the periods, and all the places. The concept of “social contract”, which gives meaning to the struggles for the rights to equality, has been brilliantly criticized for more than three decades by Pateman (1988) in her book *The Sexual Contract*. In it, she proposes the thesis that the sexual contract is a part of the original contract. It is precisely the part where a form of mass subordination takes place, that of women. This thesis fully subverts the classic idea of what the social contract implies and how it takes place. It is interpreted as the foundation of freedom. What evinces the thesis of the sexual contract as a subtext of the social contract is the fact that such freedom is based on subordination. In reality, according to this interpretive scheme, the freedom of men is for the most part domination of women. As Pateman (1988) argues, the social contract is an idea that displays great political invention since, by generating freedom for some, subordination for women becomes chronic.

The theoretical and conceptual framework of Modernity has built a political fiction—the social contract—that creates the illusion of possibility of equality, but this shall not be possible unless the private-public dichotomy is dismantled, something which Pateman pointed out as the wall that blocks such equality.

Within Western feminist theory, there is a significant amount of work dedicated to finding a way to save Modernity of this patriarchal drift (Allen, 2013). The work of Marshall (1994) is an endeavor in this direction and it could be summed up in Mme. De Stael’s famous sentence: “Lights can only be cured with more lights.”

It is with that intention that the radicalization of critique (Campillo, 1994) presents itself as the only way out. The followers of critical theory understand that this was pushed forward by Habermas (1989) when proposing the existence of emancipatory practices in the structuration of communication and the intersubjective relationships. However, the deficiencies of Habermas’ project as regards the recognition of women are clear, as Fraser pointed out (Fraser, 1990). For this reason, the very Critical Theory as built by outstanding members of the first two generations of the Frankfurt School is unable to articulate a universalist ethos that includes equality for all human beings.

The idea of harmonizing feminism and Modernity and its intern logic has been carried out intensively by the third generation of Critical Theory which has attempted to save Modernity by reinterpreting it from a feminist perspective with the critical theory. Such voices as that of Benhabib (1986, 1996) are paradigmatic in this sense. The basic idea is that a critical theory is a reflective theory which endows subjects with a knowledge that allows to change reality with the aim of gaining emancipation. But has this not been what a significant part of feminist theory has essentially been doing? Thus, it is possible that feminist theory maintains the same ambivalent relationship with Modernity as it does with Critical Theory (Campillo, 1994). In other words, feminist theory accepts the principles but it points out the flaws and tricks of Modernity and the Critical Theory that reinterprets it.

The weight of saving Modernity is still present in a significant part of the theoretical and epistemic production of Western feminism. However, a vision of theoretical struggle has emerged with great strength since the close of the 20th century in order to dismantle the epistemic assumptions of Modernity precisely on behalf of equality (Weir & Ásta, 2021). If some feminisms, starting from the third wave—whose origin dates back to the 1980s—, chose to fight against Modernity, this is so because they understand that the betrayal of equality occurs in its very foundation which later allows the existence of this inequal reality within so-called modern institutions and societies (Phillips, 2018a, 2018b).

Although Modernity may be presented as universal, it has a history and a context protected by the endeavor of such authors as Hegel who considers the Germanic culture as the keeper of all history, as denounced by Dussel (2020). In order to understand that it contains an internal logic that shall bring equality for all human beings, it must be dehistoricized, removing from it the guise that intentionally blurs the boundaries between an emancipating project and a colonizing project.

3.2. Epistemology of the South

One of the most radical critiques against this framework of universalization is the so-called “epistemology of the South.” This name was coined by Santos who elaborates a framework of reference to understand the reality of the South from the conceptions of the South. However, it is not only this author who is taking on the task of recuperating ways to understand and to relate to the world. There is a long list of authors who are treading this path (Dussel, Quijano, Segato, Escobar). The proposal for an epistemology of the South comes from the fundamental idea that the theoretical legitimization is, in fact, a part of the movement’s practice.

In his work, Santos explains how the South acts as a metaphor: the idea of going to the South, towards the South, what must be learned from the South. In his critique, which constitutes the nodal point, he tells us that it is possible to go politically to the South, although it is more necessary and pressing to go there epistemologically as well. If failing in going to the South epistemologically, nothing has been learnt, so colonial domination prevails. One of the examples that he presents is Chomsky, who in his work goes politically to the South but not epistemologically. Thus, according to De Sousa Santos (2013, p. 230), Chomsky is still anchored in the epistemology of the North.

For De Sousa Santos (2009, 2017), it is necessary to eliminate what he calls “epistemicide” in the hands of an epistemology that, although it is considered critical, it is still Eurocentric and colonial. Hence, one of his main theses is that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice. According to this framework, the basic concept that this “epistemicide” represents is the universality of Modernity. It is the universalist discursive logic which keeps emerging again and again even after dehistoricizing Modernity. So, this invalidates that Modernity framework in order to promote the equality that feminisms and other emancipatory movements are looking for. One of the requirements to configure such epistemology of the South is to see from within. As Santos says (De Sousa Santos, 2006, p. 100): “Las culturas solo son monolíticas cuando se ven de fuera o a distancia. Cuando las vemos de dentro o de cerca es fácil ver que están constituidas por varias y a veces conflictivas versiones de la misma cultura.”²

Any epistemic decolonization that brings about the foundation for a different rationality aiming to emerge as universal with a certain degree of legitimacy will require a new and profound intercultural communication. There is no longer hope for Western epistemic provincialism (Quijano, 1992). We cannot emerge as universal and central to marginalize whatever shall be treated as residual. As Segato says (Segato, 2016b, 2018), this configures an “oppressive binary structure” that is in itself violent.

The simplification and universalization of Modernity and its emancipatory theories intertwine with a founding idea as to how knowledge is produced. As Quijano (1992) points out, knowledge, in the European paradigm, is a product of the subject-object relationship. In this relationship, the subject is an almost isolated individual who constitutes itself in itself and for itself as a producer of knowledge. However, this does not have an easy translation into the epistemic context of the South, which is influenced by practices and wisdoms that come from conceptions of the world where the individual cannot be understood as isolated nor knowledge as in a previous subject/object separation. Anchoring ourselves only in these aspects—the concept of individual, the concept of knowledge, and their relationship—would suffice to begin to rescue, from epistemicide, conceptions that are quite different from that of the West.

This new framework is to have a significant impact on how feminisms are conceived. Thus, a review of social movements (Escobar & Alvarez, 1992)—and the feminist ones among them—should be conducted taking this epistemic question quite seriously for, regardless of whether any feminism has originally an emancipatory horizon, it may not take into consideration intersectional aspects that are to show the path towards equality and freedom.

The need to link every identity aspect in order to conceive a feminist proposal is a conception of unquestionable solidity in feminist theory. The concept of intersectionality is used to point out this necessity, as proposed by Crenshaw (1989) when she coined this term for feminism.

Within the theoretical framework of this study, this demand is related to another concept of unquestionable significance to understand feminist theories and movements today: Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice. Let us see how they interconnect.

Basing herself on Shklar (1990), Fricker (2007), in her analysis of the normality of injustice as a common characteristic in societies, talks about epistemic injustice as a significant form that usually goes unnoticed. Our interest is that Fricker relates this epistemic injustice to two aspects that play an essential role in our understanding of violence against women. Fricker tells us that the epistemic injustice develops into two related forms: hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice. Hermeneutical injustice refers to a lack of resources of collective interpretation. This makes it difficult for subjects to understand their own experiences and, thus, to bear witness to them and to be listened. This leads to a testimonial injustice which relates to negative and biased identity stereotypes of individuals and groups.

What interests us about Fricker's analysis is that there is a clear epistemic injustice to explain, to bear witness to, and to understand the situation of oppression that women experience due to gender violence. Women, as a group and as individuals, have suffered and still suffer a global epistemic injustice. The concept of patriarchy precisely refers to this reality of oppression and discrimination of women. According to our interpretation, this fact—along with others—is the spark that inflamed the outraged movements and the weariness of women around the world (Reverter & Medina-Vicent, 2020), and especially such movements as Me Too, Ni Una Menos, or Las Tesis.

However, the hermeneutical inequality that provokes this epistemic injustice as described by Fricker (2007) is not the same for all the women or for all the women's groups. For this reason, the proposal here is the intersectional approach as the most complete, as it can bring to light all those layers of injustice that are related to identity biases and colonial questions. This analysis helps to see how violence against women cannot be really understood—without having an overly general vision—unless it is clearly dissected the differential epistemic element that surrounds and frames each one of those episodes of violence. As it has been already seen, this is not so just because they are related to the social, cultural and political aspects involved in their development and agenda, but because an epistemic injustice would be committed if it is done otherwise. If we understand violence against women with the tools and epistemic concepts that are typical and dominant in Western feminisms (especially in the English-speaking world), we shall deny a full interpretation of current feminist demands that go beyond the hegemonic feminist groups for which the concepts of Western epistemology may (perhaps) work. Furthermore, doing this would deny the possibility to learn how subordination, oppression and violence against women work. This would ignore the layers that a system of violence such as patriarchy organizes over each element of identity and experience. This would deny us the opportunity to put an end to patriarchy as a system of oppression.

4. Feminist epistemology of the South applied to the case of violence against women

What is, then, the appropriate epistemic framework to understand violence against women? In this research, Segato's theoretical elaboration will be considered as the most suitable to understand this issue. The proposal interprets Segato's thought as an example of feminism connected to an

epistemology of the South. In her work, the embodiment of an epistemic change, along with an intersectional (thus, postcolonial) feminist view, offers us a more complete way to understand violence against women. Why more complete? We shall see.

Violence against women—as it is finally being viewed today—is one of the most generalized forms of suffering and oppression in both time and space. It affects millions of women and girls in their daily lives, in their desires, in their aspirations, in their opportunities in life. Understanding that all of this is also connected to forms of knowledge and not just to its productions—such as public policies and specific laws—is essential to transform societies and to deliver them from patriarchal violence.

Approaching the global predicament of this violence from the framework of epistemologies of the South allows us to develop alternatives as to how to approach the problem, how to articulate it, and how to solve it. Segato's view (Segato, 2003, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2018) is proposed just as an example of using a non-Western epistemic framework to understand this violence against women.

Segato's goal is to offer a “theoretical-political perspective that presents the aspirations and values attached to a historical project that is alternative and dysfunctional to capital” (Segato, 2015, p. 11). It is important to stress the words “alternative” and “dysfunctional to capital,” as these elements are, for the critique from the epistemologies of the South, consubstantial with the emancipatory practices of resistance within Latin American feminist social movements, as *Ni Una Menos* or *Las Tesis* (Colectivo Las Tesis, 2021; Villarroel Peña, 2018). For Latin American feminisms, as “other” feminisms, it is necessary to question the hegemony as there is also a feminist hegemony that dreams of a universal discourse for women, both in their oppression and in their liberation. And this is not possible, as Parra (2018a, p. 99) states. In a world increasingly dominated by the neoliberal interests of the market, the danger is to end up constituting a political subject of feminism that is tantamount to a proprietary subject (Parra, 2018b).

Within these hegemonies which are being increasingly co-opted by the neoliberal interests of the market, Segato (2016b) warns us that the body of women is a strategic objective. Her thesis is that violence against women is a command. It is not psychological or individual violence governed by pathologies; it is not even a sexual act. It is a gender command whose task is to structure continuous inequality between women and men.

“La idea de mandato hace referencia aquí al imperativo y a la condición necesaria para la reproducción del género como estructura de relaciones entre posiciones marcadas por un diferencial jerárquico e instancia paradigmática de todos los otros órdenes de estatus -racial, de clase, entre naciones o regiones” (Segato, 2003, p. 13).³

Although it is a demand that structures a system of violence, every act, every case of violence is “privatized,” so it is depoliticized and becomes invisible as a system. This allows it to become “subjectivized,” so that a judge, when facing a victim of gender violence, only sees a woman instead of a system of appropriation organized to violate her body (Segato, 2016b). This is what Segato (2016b, p. 18) calls an “exercise of adaptive transvestism.”

This move is common to all the violence against women around the world and it helps establish patriarchal practices in an almost universal way. Thus, it is a requirement to analyze specifically how these invisibilization practices are articulated in a different fashion in every culture. For instance, according to Segato: “La construcción occidental del género es una de las menos creativas, una de las menos sofisticadas, pues enyesa la sexualidad, la personalidad y los papeles sociales en el dimorfismo anatómico de manera mucho más esquemática que otras culturas no occidentales” (Segato, 2003, p. 15).⁴

Such schematization of gender identities is used by the patriarchy to perform this exercise of invisibilizing the system and the culture of gender violence. This requires a machinery of constant depoliticization that even some so-called “neoliberal” feminisms (McRobbie, 2009; Rottenberg, 2018) approve and follow. The concept of “empowerment” is one of those commonly used by this machinery that depoliticizes violence against women. Such individualizing psychologizing slogans as “you can do it,” “empower yourself,” “you only need to want it,” are examples of that neoliberal aspirational subject.

As regards this, and from the perspective of the feminisms of the South, Segato affirms:

“Combatir esas formas rutinarias de violencia es posible, pero es imprescindible entender esa lucha como parte de un trabajo de desestabilización y de erosión del propio orden de estatus, y no como un paliativo -una simple corrección de los excesos de violencia- para que éste pueda seguir su marcha autorrestauradora. El objetivo es la construcción de una sociedad -por el momento y a falta de una perspectiva utópica más clara y convincente- postpatriarcal.” (Segato, 2003, p. 17)⁵

This feminist endeavor towards transformation—and not just palliation—requires a critique of capitalism. And this is one of the clearest, most identificatory traits of some current feminisms, mainly but not uniquely of the South. For Segato, the extractive greed of the capitalist system displays, not only an appropriation and ownership of women’s bodies, but a “damnation” (Segato, 2016b) as well. This explains how the “conquest, pillage and rape” take place as parts of a pedagogy of the cruelty of patriarchy (Segato, 2018).

5. Discussion

What do these findings mean? They imply an epistemic enterprise that is, at the same time, an epistemic revolution, as Quijano (2000) calls it. The present article has offered the theoretical framework of the “epistemologies of the South” as Santos elaborates it in his works and made it enter into dialogue with the epistemic feminist and decolonial proposal of Segato. With such framework, we were able to understand violence against women in order to better comprehend practices proposed by the new feminist movements worldwide. These movements find themselves in a scenario where the ideal of equality between women and men finds global acceptance and makes up a large portion of the agendas of international agencies, there are, however, reactions that promote the conservative familiaristic return and even the denial of rights that have been already attained such as abortion and sexual diversity. It is within this struggle that it should be understood the spark of outrage that sets the feminist revolt afire around the world.

From this framework, the individual character of the subject of Modernity and its epistemology appears quite visible to us, not only in the individualistic drift of current societies, but also in its insertion into the critique of Modernity conducted from the very feminisms of the West. As a brief example, we may quote Rottenberg (2019), who points out how the MeToo movement focuses on encouraging women to report cases of sexual harassment, but it eludes the component of the economic and political structure that sustains it.

In order to give theoretical value to the feminisms that form the base of social movements against gender violence, we must place ourselves, as Anzaldúa (1987) said, in and out, sway between their selves and our selves. As Gorbach and Rufer (2016) state, in order to conceive the margins, we must (in)discipline thought. To conceive ways to understand and transform violence against women, it is necessary to follow an epistemic strategy—new ways placed outside the theoretical matrix of Western feminism. This theoretical exercise allows us to understand practices and representations that are otherwise invisible. As Segato (2015, p. 15) says: “La elección teórica está determinada por los intereses propios de las metas históricas que persigue el investigador y será siempre, por esto mismo, una elección teórico-política que precede a la investigación misma, esta, sí, pauta por la objetividad.” Hence, it is required to put an end to what Segato (2016b, p. 26) calls “fetishism of the North.”

By abandoning this fetishism, we may find out that there are two ultimate forms of desire for social change. The one Segato (2016b, p. 27) calls “desire for things” which produces individuals, and “desire for relational attachment” which produces community; understanding that the former is the one behind a noncritical version of Western epistemology and the latter is the one at the base of the epistemology of the South. This latter desire is dysfunctional to the historical project of the capital since attaching oneself to the bonds as the pillar of life protects it from the detachment and vulnerability which is normally implied in the desire for things. Furthermore, it drags the subject to a psychologizing drift, to a way of understanding life and its tensions in an individual way so that it would have to be resolved through mechanisms of personal psychological empowerment.

The individual character plays a key role in the discourses of liberation and empowerment of some feminisms since women, individually, have been able to free themselves by tearing down social structures, disciplinary rules of the community, and patterns of habits and norms of oppression. However, it is also true that to talk about the material articulation of liberation and empowerment, it is necessary to have the intersubjective and collective dimension. From the perspective of the epistemologies and feminisms of the South (regardless of the place where they are practiced), there is a rebellion regarding the constitution of their individualities as otherness, as mere objects. Therefore, they are not related to knowledge but as an object, never as a knowledge-producing subject. There is also a critique of that individual vision that cancels knowledge practices as a collective thing in constant interrelation between subjects, and between subject and object. The decolonial epistemologies and of the South propose a vision of the subject as interrelated intersubjectively with the world of objects and nature. There is an idea of totality; however, it is a totality that includes and relies on heterogeneity, on diversity, and even on conflict. It is this network of relationships that form the sense of a non-Western epistemology which may very well be useful to better understand violence against women and the new movements to fight it.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this research help us respond to the question that was posed in the beginning: What epistemic change is needed to understand the systemic violence against women? Are we using the appropriate conceptual framework in order to understand and terminate the practice of control and violence against women? The idea of this article is to understand the need to have a suitable conceptual framework to assess other epistemologies and, thus, understand and transform all the different kinds of patriarchal violence against women. With this, it has been proposed a way to interweave concepts and theories that offer an epistemic framework suiting the characteristics of the new global feminist social movements. The most significant theoretical implication is the need to add, as part of the feminist theory, the categories and concepts that can explain those realities that differ from the hegemonic ones of the West (or North in the Brandt Report theory). Indeed, according to the intersectional feminism defended here, all social emancipation movements have a global nature no matter where they emerge. They are global because, regardless of their specific circumstances and geographic characteristics and their identity differences as groups, they require treatment as regards equality. The separation of universal and residual largely refers to a sort of epistemic provincialism that lies at the very base of the violence and oppression of some groups against others.

In short, what it has been exposed in this article is that only an intersectional feminism which takes into account all the diverse layers of oppression, discrimination and inequality, and does so from the perspective of an epistemic revolution like the one proposed by the feminisms and epistemologies of the South, shall be able to become just one as it develops in diverse emancipatory agendas, actions and practices. The collective action of women is not just aimed at obtaining equal rights (Kantola & Verloo, 2018), but at obtaining the right to difference. As Segato (2016b) points out, these differences are not satisfied with a multiculturalism of minority elites as the Western think-tanks apparently thought in the 1990s. The rights to difference require a modification of the processes of extractive exploitation and accumulation of wealth (Federici,

2004) and this demands, in turn, a decolonial feminism that, as Espinosa-Miñoso (2014, p. 7) defends, is “above all and over all, an epistemic enterprise.”

The path proposed here is to work together in order to weave an intersectional and decolonial feminism that is able to include transforming theorizations and practices that can overcome the epistemic injustice of any feminism that considers itself universal.

Funding

Main researcher of the project “La agenda de igualdad: resistencias, retos y respuestas” (Generalitat Valenciana, AICO/2020/327). This work was supported by the Generalitat Valenciana under Grant AICO 2020/327.

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Citation information

Cite this article as: Epistemologies of violence against women. A proposal from the South, Sonia Reverter, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2022), 8: 2038356.

Notes

1. This article presents just a theoretical reflection on the opportunity to use other epistemological frameworks to study violence against women. It is not the aim neither the possibility, given the length limitations, to include a detailed and structured comparison of “Western approaches” from “South approaches”. It is, however, a complementary research that shall improve the theoretical thesis maintained here. As a good example of practical and detailed study of the deficits of the “Western framework” in approaching sexual violence see Armstrong et al. (2018). As a fruitful analysis to see the practical effects on gendered violence of the epistemic Global south frame see Martínez Andrade (2019) in a text with interviews to the main researchers of this topic around the global south, not only latinoamericans.
2. My own translation: “Cultures are monolithic only when they are seen from the outside or from a distance. When we see them from within or up close, it is easy to see that they are made up of several and at times conflicting versions of the same culture.”
3. My own translation: “The idea of command refers here to the imperative and the necessary condition for the reproduction of gender as a structure of relationships between positions defined by a hierarchical differential and a paradigmatic organization of all the other orders of racial, class status between nations and regions.”
4. My own translation: “The Western construction of gender is one of the least creatives, one of the least sophisticated, as it plasters sexuality, personality and social roles with anatomical dimorphism in a much more schematic way than other non-Western cultures.”
5. My own translation: “It is possible to fight these daily forms of violence, although it is paramount to understand this fight as part of an endeavor of destabilization and erosion of the very status order rather than a palliative – a simple amendment of the excess of violence – so that it may continue on its self-restoring path. The goal is the construction – temporarily as there is no clearer, more convincing utopian perspective – of a post-patriarchal society.”

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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