



## **Fantasised alterity, inaudible voices. Notes for a critique of the coloniality of desire<sup>1</sup>**

*Alteridades fantaseadas, voces inaudibles. Apuntes  
para una crítica de la colonialidad del deseo*

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### **Abstract**

Adopting the decolonial theoretical framework, as far as gender issues are concerned, we will address an important issue: the sexual imaginaries which, from Western cultures, have been projected onto non-Western alterities. In this regard, we will discuss "fantasised alterities" and the "coloniality of desire" in order to connote certain processes of domination which have to do with the racialisation of sexuality and with the sexualisation of race. However, we will at the same time address the criticisms which have been brought against Western-centric hegemonic feminism from the "other feminisms", because the former has on too many occasions been a discourse complicit in the secular subalternization of all "non-white" women, that is, racialized. Moreover, this complicity has been rooted specifically in the ignorance and misunderstanding of the intersectionality of gender, sex, race and class.

**Keywords:** Decolonial feminisms. Sexualisation of race. Racialisation of sex. Fantasised alterities. Coloniality of desire.

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## Resumen

*Asumiendo el marco teórico decolonial, en lo que a las cuestiones de género se refiere, abordaremos una cuestión importante: los imaginarios sexuales que, desde las culturas occidentales, han sido proyectados sobre las alteridades no-occidentales. En ese sentido, hablaremos de “alteridades fantaseadas” y de “colonialidad del deseo” para connotar ciertos procesos de dominación que tienen que ver con la racialización de la sexualidad y con la sexualización de la raza. Pero abordaremos, al mismo tiempo, las críticas que desde los “feminismos otros” han sido lanzadas contra el feminismo hegemónico de cuño occidentalocéntrico, pues éste ha sido en demasiadas ocasiones un discurso cómplice con la subalternización secular de todas las mujeres “no-blancas”, esto es, racializadas. Y esa complicidad ha radicado, precisamente, en la ignorancia y en la incomprensión de la interseccionalidad de género, sexo, raza y clase.*

**Palabras clave:** *Feminismos decoloniales. Sexualización de la raza. Racialización del sexo. Alteridades fantaseadas. Colonialidad del deseo.*

## Introduction

In this paper we will critically reflect upon issues relating to certain sexual imaginaries which have been portrayed regarding non-Western and non-white alterities. We will do so based on the theoretical coordinates of the “decolonial turn”. To this end, we will bring into play two notions which, in our view, are in operation and pertinent, namely “fantasised alterities” and the “coloniality of desire”. In the first section or heading, we will see how, from the point of view of feminist criticism, it was understood that one of the main ideological elements which historically sustained patriarchal dominance was the following: to purport that women were more “subject” to biology, or more “proximate” to nature. In the second section, however, we will analyse some of the criticisms which the “decolonial feminisms” delivered against the hegemonic feminism of a Eurocentric or Western-centric bent, given that this has often tended to be a discourse complicit with the subalternisation of all “non-white” women, that is, racialised. In the final two sections, we will observe how certain processes of

domination have been linked, fundamentally, with the racialisation of sexuality and with the sexualisation of race. We will conclude, after establishing this framework, that “non-white” bodies (mainly female ones, but sometimes also male) have been seen as hosts of a pre-civilised and animalistic sexuality (fantasised alterity), and that therefore these imaginaries would constitute another element of that complex sociocultural grammar which many men and women have referred to using the term “coloniality”.

## 1. Closer to nature, more subject to biology

An accentuated dichotomization between the “strictly” male and “strictly” female attributes may be observed in the work of Rousseau. In this sense, men have been defined or characterized as mainly rational subjects, while women, on the other hand, have been represented as basically emotional, reproductive beings (COBO, 1995). Therefore, Rousseau eventually established a binary or dual symbolic play through which it was established that women were closer to “nature”, while men belonged more essentially to the universe of “culture” (ORTNER, 1974). However, the dualism *Culture/Nature* corresponded with other analogous pairs, and all of them operated in the same way when characterizing men and women differently. The concepts of *Reason/Emotion* or, using the Kantian terminology, *Conception/Sensible Intuition* apply: the element on the left would always appear inextricably linked to the masculine, and the second element of the dualism always linked to the feminine. In other words, under similar coordinates, women were always framed in the triad *Nature/Emotion/Sensible Intuition*, while men emerged on the boundaries of the prestigious triad *Culture/Reason/Concept*. In this “logo-phallus-centric” construction, men appear as being able for conceptual reasoning, while women remain anchored at a sensitive and intuitive level (AMORÓS, 1991; VALCÁRCEL, 1997). Similar symbolic-material distributions, found in multiple moments and places in the history of Western thought, have always harbored profound sociopolitical effects, as they infer that only men would be able to act in the public sphere and interfere in the political universe, while women

would be situated – confined or encapsulated – in that other private-domestic sphere (pre-civic or sub-political status) centered on the reproductive labor. Women - and the work of the Genevan philosopher merely represents a well-distilled example among many others that could be mentioned – appear hetero-designated as being endowed for reproduction, upbringing, and child-related care. By definition, they would be excluded from the political – or citizenship – and scientific spheres. And so it was, for a long time.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir observed how a wide intellectual tradition had placed women in an irremediable bodily immanence, anchored in this corporeal-reproductive sphere and unable to transcend towards other more complex or exalted activities (BEAUVOIR, 1995, p. 58). Representing women – or constructing them discursively – as an essentially bodily being has been, for a very long time, a mechanism of power and control: she – source of all disturbance, all sins, and all sensualist temptation – incarnated (never better said) the dark, pre-logical, primitive, and instinctive side of the species; women have always been “the other side” of reason. Consequently, women should be governed and supervised by the rational part, that is, by men (as long as such men consisted in a “genuine” or non-feminized male). Such “distribution” of roles remained present for long centuries in the philosophical thought, starting with the invariable dualism body/soul observed in the Platonic *Phaedo*. However, it is true that in different passages of the *Republic* (in VII, 540c, for example) or *The Law* (in VII, 804d-805c) it is possible to find Plato demonstrating openly “feminist” positions, stipulating an identical educational formation and political position for men and women.

Nevertheless, the subsequent Christian philosophy consolidated such situation of women in the immanent plane of the corporeal, that is, in a space stripped of spirit and *logos*. This can be clearly observed in Saint Thomas (PÉREZ ESTÉVEZ, 2008). In fact, in the Thomist philosophy, the female-mother operated as the *matter*, while men acted as the *form*. And within the coordinates of this Aristotelian-rooted metaphysics, such matter is considered a kind of non-being, that is, a “being-in-potency” that can

only reach the “being-in-act” status when the form falls upon them. The matter (female) is an imperfect, deficient, and incomplete reality that only becomes a legitimate and complete being when it is determined by the form (male). And this alleged ontic inferiority of women had an immediate axiological translation: women should always be governed by men, as the former required the active potency of the latter to fulfill, among others, their generative function: females simply contributed with an impotent “raw material”; males represented the efficient and formal cause of every generation. Psychoanalysis (REA, 2011) and its Lacanian version (FRASER, 2015, pp. 169-180) also contributed, in a certain way, to determine and reinforce the phallogocentrism of hegemonic, symbolic order by appealing to certain “laws” of desire and sex that would operate as immutable, unchangeable psychic principles *not* derivable of social practices (a transcendental psychic economy, that is, ahistorical and cross-cultural). Thus, some psychoanalytic discourses would have legitimized certain elements of the patriarchal discourse, providing a kind of “psychic shield” to the historical subordination of women.

Nevertheless, in the twentieth century and according to the so-called “sexual revolution” occurred in several Western and industrially developed countries, a new inflection was produced, as pointed out by Rosa Cobo:

The culture of sexualization of women occurred in the last decades in the West can be interpreted in light of that ontology of the feminine generated by the patriarchal culture and that oscillates between reproduction and prostitution, between motherhood and seduction. In other words, the hypersensualization of the feminine is the condition of possibility that a culture of pornography and prostitution may be developed. [...] However, this new culture of sexuality is articulated around the idea that erotic pleasure is a masculine right, which should be developed both in the marriage and in prostitution. Nonetheless, the underlying idea of this text is that the overload of sexuality assigned to women is the condition of possibility not only for the formation of a culture of prostitution, but also for the construction of a sex industry in which the commercialization of female bodies is the central axis (2015, p. 10).

A new culture emerged with the sexual revolution occurred in the second half of the last century, in which sexuality and the demand for pleasure are placed at the center of the symbolic imaginary. Such irruption is certainly closely related to this new stage of capitalism – the ultra-consumerist post-Fordism – that systematically promotes mass

hedonism (POLO BLANCO, 2010). This process undoubtedly produced certain emancipatory effects in terms of liberation of sexuality from old repressive normativities. However, the fact that at the same time new relations of domination were emerging, in this case related to the oversexualization of women, should not be neglected under any circumstances. Therefore, through the fulgent irruption of multiple erotic-aesthetic codes, new mechanisms of control and tyranny emerged (GREER, 2001). In a certain way, a schizophrenic process would have occurred: the old narrative of homemaking as a “natural fate” for all women would be combined and intertwined with the imperative of tirelessly cultivating self-beauty, that is, with the indeclinable obligation of investing in their own “erotic capital” in order to be sexually attractive as long as possible (HAKIM, 2017). However, in the era of global capitalism, the female body hypersexualized up to paroxysm (including the body of girls) has become an inexhaustible source of capital gain. The sex industry (both licit and illicit) moves astronomical amounts of money; it is “the vagina industry”, as accurately designated by Sheila Jeffreys (2012). All of this would be nothing more than a brutal step towards the limit of everything that Silvia Federici (2010) already explained in relation to the historical processes of “primitive accumulation”, which propitiated the transition to capitalism and that were sustained not only in the violent expropriation of communal lands, but also in the equally violent expropriation of the female body, which from that moment would be forcibly enlisted in a space of unremunerated “reproductive labor” and, therefore, thrown into an obscurely sub-political space and categorized as non-productive. Therefore, these female bodies were converted into a very rich and lucrative source of absolute capital gain.

The latter, although undoubtedly crucial, is not within the scope of the present paper. Now this study aims at emphasizing the fact that women, in the secular patriarchal imaginary, present a kind of “subjection to biology”. However, it is important to emphasize this last point, taking into account that this “proximity to biology” is intensely accentuated when considering all those women presenting a “darker” complexion and inhabiting the vast postcolonial and/or neo-colonized

geographies; or, at all events, the migrants located in the central countries of the world-system and that come from other parts of the world. As it will be mentioned later, those women were produced – and, therefore, imagined – by two correlated, feedbacked discursive apparatuses: bestialization and hypersexualization.

## **2. Occidentalocentric feminism and decolonial feminisms**

Thinkers of the so-called “giro decolonial” (decolonial shift) (CASTRO-GÓMEZ and GROSFUGUEL, 2007) emphasized that the imperialism did not turn out to be merely an economic-territorial or political-military process; it operated as a powerful, perfectly greased discursive mechanism that produced subjectivities, generating cultural grammars and molecular mechanisms of domination involving class, ethnicity/race, and definitely gender factors. In this sense, it is necessary to consider a “multiple coloniality” (POLO BLANCO, 2018). And, in any case, a specific “gender coloniality” may be located and tracked in its intersection with class and race (LUGONES, 2011; CASTILLO, 2016). Moreover, an intricate “intersectionality” of race, class, sexuality, and gender shall be constantly observed. Likewise, Rita Laura Segato (2011) affirms that the intertwining of coloniality and patriarchy produces a distinct specificity, that is, a rearticulation of gender relations that leads to a new constellation of hierarchies and violence that could be named “modern/colonial gender system”, as designated by María Lugones (2008a, pp. 92-93), expanding and making more complex everything that Aníbal Quijano theorized about the coloniality of power. That “racial classification” approached by the Peruvian thinker (QUIJANO, 1992, p. 438) also presented in itself, in a constitutive and consubstantial way, a specific set of hierarchies related to gender and sex. In this sense, the modern colonial system would have introduced the “gender” as a mechanism of categorization and hierarchization/exclusion in societies in which, until that moment, there had been nothing similar to a “gender difference” operating as a structuring principle of the

symbolic order or as an inexorable marker of sociopolitical roles (ALLEN, 1992; OYEWUMI, 1997).

However, it is important to investigate in a very critical manner how the hegemonic feminism, essentially occidentalocentric, has built the “poor woman of the third world”. Such construction has generated complaisance, in the best case. Furthermore, this feminism of the global North has often incurred in “survivalist” rhetorics, depriving racialized women of the South from self-representation, and ultimately considering them unable for self-empowerment (BIDASECA, 2011). However, the postcolonial or decolonial feminism has gone further, pointing out that the categories “gender”, “patriarchy”, or “male domination” (BOURDIEU, 2007), when used in a cross-cultural or ahistorical manner (as European and North-American feminists have made in a number of occasions), have paradigmatically condensed – hypostasized – the problems of “white heterosexual women belonging to middle and upper classes” as if, in fact, they incarnated the archetype of all women of the world (MOHANTY, 2008; LOZANO LERMA, 2010). Such Eurocentric feminist discourse – or “Americentric”, using the neologism – would be neglecting the “colonial wound”, using a term by Walter D. Mignolo (2007). By doing this, it could be operating as an implicitly, but eminently, racist discourse represented in this scenario: poor, racialized women cleaning houses and taking care of children of white, middle/upper class women so that these latter may have the opportunity to empower themselves in the public sphere by accessing the labor market or the academic life. European and North American feminists justly criticized Man, this figure of the erudite humanism that, in practice, excluded half the population from the citizen status. Consequently, they established another new supposedly universal subject when approaching the “women's liberation”, as the signifier “Woman” only referred, in this case, to Western white woman; and not even to all of them, as poor women – even being white and Western – could not remain analytically included, taking into account their specifically economic exclusion.

However, the subject is even more complex, considering that some feminisms outlined from the global South – refer to Latin America – have internalized part of the occidentalocentric schemes, uncritically assuming the theoretical constructs of the white feminists of the global North and, for this reason, having produced discourses that only approach the problems of urban, white-mestizo women, ignoring or underestimating, with such procedure, the specific characteristics of rural and/or indigenous women, for example (ESPINOSA, 2014). Therefore, such theoretical practices would continue significantly reproducing the coloniality of power and knowledge; after all, as it is known, it is possible to be physically rooted in the South and, at the same time, remain epistemically installed in an imaginary of the North.

In order for the counterhegemonic feminisms to move towards effectively decolonial coordinates, it is necessary to dialogue with the indigenous or community feminisms, in the case of Latin America; the experiences, knowledge, and resistances of all these women must be valued, as they have to fight against powerful material and symbolic structures: they have to get rid of the Eurocentric, modern, colonial patriarchy; but, at the same time they have to face an original and premodern patriarchy, which is exercised over them by their own community partners (GARGALLO, 2014; PAREDES, 2014; PAREDES, 2015). In fact, the very culture – with its ancestral traditions – often oppresses women, placing them in a “natural place” related to bringing up children and reproduction of life, consequently depriving them from any leading role in collective decision-making processes. Ancestral patriarchy and modern patriarchy overlap and intertwine. Only a feminism that dialogues with the experiences and “voices” of those women shall be able to get rid of those residues of coloniality.

Afro-American writer and activist Gloria Jean Watkins, better known as *bell hooks* (as she signed her works, written in lower case), in an essential text, pointed out that “white women who currently master the feminist discourse seldom question whether or not their perspective on the reality of women corresponds to the vital experiences of women as a collective. Also, they are not aware of the extent to which

their views reflect race and class prejudices, despite the increasing level of awareness about such prejudices in recent years” (2004, p. 35). Painfully, she explained that the feminist literature (at least in the United States) was permeated with racism; discourses outlined by white women (Anglo-Saxons) belonging to the upper-middle class that were unable (or unwilling) to understand the differential factor implied by the “race”. Tyrannized by the male chauvinism of their male partners (also white, Anglo-Saxons, belonging to an economically privileged class), they claimed to convert their own experience into *the* experience of all women. Nancy Fraser (1997, pp. 235-239) pointed out that both the “equality feminists” and the “difference feminists” had equally incurred that bias. Therefore, in their writings it was not possible to apprehend that a working class black woman suffered – *in addition to* chauvinist sexism – with racism and economic misery. Patriarchy, classism, and racism are different structures of domination, each one with its own logic and intensity; not to mention homophobia, as things get markedly worse when, in addition to being a woman, black, and poor, the person is a lesbian. However, much has been written about the “intersectionality” of all these vectors of domination (NAGEL, 2003; WILLIAMS, 2005; DORLIN, 2008).

Therefore, the occidentalocentric feminist discourse has operated for a long time with schemes (political and epistemic) permeated with coloniality. Firstly, because the “racial factor” was not considered as a determinant; the *specificity* of the racist oppression was *subsumed* (as a secondary or insignificant matter) in a presumably greater and more important problem: the liberation of *all* women, over and above race and social class. However, such “over and above” is not real, as race and class are decisive factors intertwined with the patriarchal matter. Therefore, such subsumption was very deceitful, as black women had – have – to achieve their liberation from the patriarchy, in fact, but they *also* have to fight to become free from racism and, often, from heterosexism and poverty; the combinations, in this sense, are numerous. And the seriousness of the matter consisted in the fact that such racism, classism, and heterosexism were also exercised against them by other white woman. The idyllic “sorority” has been conspicuous by its absence; furthermore, used in an abstract

manner, it has served to conceal or make invisible other subordinations. White feminists themselves, in a number of occasions, treated with disdain and condescension those black women that wanted to join the movement. “Little has been written about the attempts by white feminists to silence black women” (BELL HOOKS, 2004, p. 45). It is true that such bitter words were written in 1984, and since then the feminist criticism theory has been presenting an increasingly powerful and sophisticated theoretical arsenal with respect to race. “Black feminisms” (BELL HOOKS, 1981; CRENSHAW, 1991; JABARDO, 2012), “Muslim or Islamic feminisms” (GROSGOUEL, 2016), “Indigenous feminisms” or “community feminisms” (CUMES, 2009; GALINDO, 2013; ESPINOSA *et al.*, 2014), “Chicano feminisms” (ANZALDÚA, 2016) or “decolonial and postcolonial feminisms” (MOHANTY, 2003; LUGONES, 2008b; SEGATO, 2015) have been put on the table with great force, and that white, heterosexual, classist, eurocentric, and occidentalocentric feminism has been reviewed or harshly criticized within the ranks of the very feminist movement. It was necessary to “blacken and indigenize” the feminist discourse (FONSECA y GUZZO, 2018). In short, the feminism also had to be decolonized.

### **3. Sexualization of race, racialization of sex**

In a pioneering study on racism and sexuality in colonial Cuba, Verena Stolcke (1992) showed how the racial hierarchies and gender subordinations were intertwined or comprised. Light-skinned, upper class men reaffirmed their privileged position through a strict control of the sexuality of white women – “their” women – and, at the same time, had easy “access” to “darker” complexion women belonging to a lower social status. The power relations constituted in this way, within this complex race/gender/class system, allowed a domination over white women (with appeals to their honor and social respectability) and a domination over the *other* women, particularly those poorer and darker-skinned, to whom it was relatively easy to “gain access” through extramarital relationships that, as a matter of fact, did not diminish the

honor of a man. Socioeconomic, racial, and patriarchal privileges were all in a perfect symbiosis. And above all, at the same time, there was a stereotype of the “black” or “mulatto” woman presented – or imagined – as an easily sexually excitable creature and, therefore, always willing to have sex with white men (KUTZINSKI, 1993). Such mythology, which is an inherent part of the so-called “coloniality of desire”, operated as a perfect framework that legitimated certain interracial sexual relations – which were, nevertheless, asymmetric. After all, perhaps when two bodies meet they are also facing two collective memories and two social imaginaries; and even when pure coercion or physical force does not intervene – and only seduction mediates – certain coloniality grammars may be operating, ultimately leading to the thought that such “encounters” do not always occur in equality terms or genuine freedom.

Imperialism has plundered not only territories, but also bodies. This is a crucial knowledge to understand the complexity of the phenomenon of domination. In this sense, it is important to consider that the structures of power in the colonial period, and similarly in the postcolonial world, have been producing a certain sexualization of races or a certain racialization of sexualities. In fact, it is important to point out that this report attributing an exacerbated or obscene sexuality – and therefore bestialized – to all “non-white” female bodies also affects certain groups of non-white males. This can be verified in this well-established, prevalent imaginary that projects an archetype of Afro-descendent men as fundamentally Dionysian beings, particularly predisposed for sensual enjoyment, dance, and love arts, always in addition to an unrestrained, inexhaustible sexual power (VIVEROS VIGOYA, 2002a y 2002b; MOUTINHO, 2004 y 2008; VIVEROS VIGOYA, et al., 2006). In all these imaginaries, produced or entangled around race and sexuality, an unquestionable colonial mark is observed (CONGOLINO, 2008). However, for that matter, such sexualization of races – or racialization of sexualities – has affected women with more intensity, as they always suffer an extra dose of subjugation in relation to their male partners, even though in this case a different relation of domination is experienced.

#### 4. “Non-white” bodies as spaces of a pre-civilized and bestial sexuality

Within a kind of radical constructivism, Judith Butler argued that even the materiality of the bodies is an effect of power. In other words, it is not a matter of having a pre-discursive body on which multiple cultural codes are registered; it is that even the very corporality is a product of the various power/knowledge schemes. The very materiality of the body (with all its gesticulations, expressiveness, and potentiality), and not just the “gender”, is indistinguishable from the very normative system that has prefigured, regulated, channeled, and enabled it (BUTLER, 2002, pp. 18-19). Therefore, these premises may be very useful, as the history of colonialism is fundamentally a history of the “racial marking” of bodies (WADE, 2002). Phenotypic traits, in their own immanence, have no concrete meaning; they only start to signify or connote certain things when they appear (and they *always* do) under the light of certain discursive mechanisms or under the focus of certain semiotic frames. Only then it is possible to observe how the color of the skin, considering the paradigmatic example of racially marked phenotypic traits, begins to be absolutely relevant in relation to a distinct placement in the symbolic, axiological, epistemic, and political hierarchies that have been operating in the modern-colonial system-world.

However, it is important to emphasize other instances that also turn out to be an *effect* of the symbolic, discursive construction: sexual desire and pleasure. Evidently, the fact that both realities settle on a neurophysiological basis cannot be ignored; no one will deny the existence of the nervous system as a material substrate (biochemical or electrochemical) of the sensations of pleasure. However, in another plane of signification, it is important to emphasize that both “desire” and “sexual pleasure” are political realities, that is, realities constructed by certain cultural grammars and, therefore, permeated by multiple power relations. In turn, as it is known, Michel Foucault (2000) emphasized that power could be basically negative: breaking resistances, forcing obedience, inhibiting, threatening, classifying, regulating, secluding,

molding, silencing, prohibiting, censoring, and imposing; in this case, it would represent a compendium of violence designed to break down, repeal, or redirect the desire and will. Notwithstanding, the French thinker understood that power is not only negative-repressive, as it became primordially positive-producer, actively generating docile and disciplined bodies. Power not only crushes wills; above all, it produces subjectivities. Well, following this Foucauldian model, it is possible to emphasize that sexual desire – and the very pleasure that people are able to experience and/or aspire – are also an effect or product of certain discursive frameworks.

However, if sexuality, desire, and pleasure have been historically produced in all historical and cultural contexts by different schemes of power/knowledge, a specific colonial mechanics of sexual desire could certainly be found. Or, using the terminology used by the thinkers of the so-called “*giro decolonial*” (decolonial shift), a *coloniality of sexual desire* would exist. The epicenter of that coloniality has been - and still are - the racialized bodies of otherness. Thus, this is how these bodies became organic surfaces on which a certain sexual imaginary is inscribed and projected. Because the corporeal is not natural; the body is symbolically codified, built by a hegemonic narrative, as mentioned above. Historically, the female body has been hetero-designated and hetero-regulated by multiple power discourses. And, in the case of certain “non-white” women (that is, of non-Caucasian phenotype), the occidentalocentric narrative has imagined a type of “seductive animal”; in this case, these bodies have been connoted or codified as bearers of an exuberant sexuality and imperishable lubricity. Abject but at the same time attractive, non-white female bodies are converted into the fabulous repository of an indomitable, pre-civilized sexual energy, which produces fascination and terror in equivalent proportions. Bodies that, within this great fable, exude and secrete a grotesque promiscuity (VAINFAS, 2010).

Such narrative imagines that such bodies are always *available* to the Westerner, regardless of being a nineteenth-century traveler/adventurer or a twenty-first century tourist. In contexts of slavery, the same white men that confined their “race partners” in a role of weakness, sexual passivity, or frigidity, imagined the black slaves linked to

an overwhelming, aggressive lust. Therefore, they appeared characterized with different features of a sexual perversity that bordered, at all times, with bestiality (COLLINS, 2000, p. 82). In this same investigative line, Ann McClintock (1995, p. 22) evoked how European travelers exaggeratedly filled all their “ethnographic observations” regarding those distant and tropical lands; men with large penises or women that married and copulated with apes were recurrently present in such “descriptions” reported by colonial travelers visiting the “savage” territories of the Empire. However, in such imaginary that was being developed, “non-white” women appeared as the epitome of all sexual aberrations, being represented – even more than men – as beings committed to an hyperbolical lubricity that went beyond the borders of monstrosity.

Edward Said (2008, pp. 254-259) observed how the occidentalocentric imaginary projected its own fantasies of overerotization in colonized women. In the letters and stories of European travelers, the “mysterious East” appeared full of lustful sensuality. “Eastern women” (such as Caribbean or Afro-descendant women, when considering the Americas) presented an unquenchable sexual desire. As an example, Said points out in Gustave Flaubert such fascination with the lustful fragrances of Eastern women; but, at the same time, the bearers of such temptations appear plunged into silence, devoid of intelligence and will. Women dancing in a bestial, insinuating, and feverish manner, evoking images of carnal pleasure and reproductive power that break the tedious monotony of the bourgeois, metropolitan life, but always appearing devoid of their own voice. These “orientalisms”, which discursively articulate a set of sexual imaginaries, have been part of the secular imperial domination exerted by Europe. Such imaginaries certainly persisted in the postcolonial world, and a certain *coloniality of desire* still operates as an integral part of the coloniality of power.

## 5. Final considerations

What enables us to speak of a coloniality of desire? Because the bodies of all those racialised women becomes a “mute surface” in which all the desires of white

Western men are projected; besides, a class-related factor exerts influence on such bodies, as those women (fantasized otherness), in addition to being “non-white” bodies, are often also poor women situated in (or from) peripheral countries. In this sense, their poverty or “underdevelopment” operates as another element of fantasy. We will observe, in accordance with all of the above, that the scope of sexual desire (or the field of action of the erotic) emerges as a “territory” – one more – which is penetrated by coloniality. Indeed, the processes of the racialisation of sex and the sexualisation of race crystallised in certain “imaginaries of desire” sketched out and portrayed *from* the Eurocentric (or Western-centric) matrix; imaginaries in which those “non-white” or non-western women were “trapped”. We must consider, however, that this “imprisonment” within certain imaginaries gives rise to multiple material (socio-political) effects, underpinning and sustaining certain relationships of dominance.

The term “mute surfaces” is used because, in fact, those women (racialised and sexualised in the aforementioned sense) appear as subalternized subjects and, therefore, inaudible; or, anyway, as “low voices”, in the sense given by Ranahit Guha (2002), expressing their systematic silencing. Subaltern individuals, especially women, are precisely defined as lacking a “place of enunciation” (SPIVAK, 1988). Women whose “exotic” body and “savage” sexuality appear as effects of an occidentalocentric imaginary projection (an otherness built as a fantasy of domination) and whose “voice”, at the same time, becomes silenced or virtually inaudible. Thus, another element of that grammar of domination, which is designated coloniality, was articulated and settled. In this case, the presence of a specific coloniality of desire would be observed.

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