

BOOK REVIEW

Pensamento Feminista Hoje: Perspectivas Decoloniais.
Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, editor. Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do
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When I received the invitation to review *Pensamento Feminista Hoje: Perspectivas Decoloniais* (*Feminist Thought Today: Decolonial Perspectives*), I was excited to engage in this work that centers leading feminist scholars from around the world, published in Portuguese. However, my second thought was, they do realize that I'm a feminist anthropologist, and not a feminist philosopher, right? In this essay, I will offer a brief description and overview of the book, as well as a detailed description of a subset of essays that offer key contributions, from my perspective as a Black feminist anthropologist.

A key strength of this book is the national, regional, linguistic, racial, and ethnic diversity of the contributors. Of the twenty-two contributors, eleven are from Brazil, two are from Ecuador, two are from Bolivia, and two are from the Dominican Republic, as well as one contributor each from Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Algeria, and Nigeria. Eight of the contributors self-identify as Black. In this sense, the editor, Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda, certainly reflects an awareness of the diversity of women's lives and transnational feminist perspectives.

The book is divided into three major sections: “Desafiando Matrizes” (Challenging Matrices); “Práticas Decoloniais” (Decolonial Practices); and “Outras Línguas: Três Artistas Brasileiras” (Other Languages: Three Brazilian Artists). The editor admits that these divisions are arbitrary, and that they “reinforce the urgency of eliminating the binary between theory and practice” (30). The book consists of an introduction, sixteen chapters, and includes three artist profiles at the end.

In the introduction, Buarque de Hollanda offers an overview of the decolonial turn, summarizing some of the key interventions of Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Anibal Quijano, and María Lugones. Maldonado-Torres defines the decolonial turn as “a movement of political and epistemological resistance to the logic of modernity/coloniality” (16). Buarque de Hollanda asserts that decolonial feminism “denounces the structural imbrication of notions of heteronormativity, racial classification, and the capitalist system” (17). She provides a chapter overview that highlights key interventions from the contributors, such as Julieta Paredes's concept of “community feminism,” and Maria da Graça Costa's argument that feminism is crucial to agroecology.

The “Challenging Matrices” section opens with a foundational 1988 essay by Afro-Brazilian feminist scholar Lélia Gonzalez, which denounces how feminism has often “forgotten” about the racial question. Drawing upon Lacanian thought, Gonzalez argues that Black women have been “spoken about, defined and classified

by an ideological system of domination that infantilizes us” (41). Consequently, this ideological system suppresses Black women’s humanity and denies them the right to be subjects of their own discourses and history (42). Gonzalez introduces the term *amefricanidade*, which highlights the commonalities in the histories of Iberian colonization, slavery, and racial ideologies in the Latin American region. She argues that *amefricanas* and *ameríndias* “are the most oppressed and exploited” in the patriarchal racist capitalist system of Latin America (46). Gonzalez also discusses the important role of indigenous and Black movements in making people aware of class and racial oppression. Although Black and indigenous women were actively engaged in Black and indigenous social movements, they also experienced gender discrimination in these spaces (48). For instance, Black women were often excluded from decision-making power within the Black movement. Nonetheless, Black women did not find a welcoming space for their activism within the women’s movement either. Gonzalez writes, “we sought out the MM (Movimento de Mulheres), feminist theory and practice, believing that there we would find a solidarity as important as racial solidarity: that of sisterhood. But what we effectively found are racist practices of exclusion and domination” (48).

As a result of feeling invisible within the Movimento de Mulheres, Black women chose to organize themselves within ethnic groups. For instance, Gonzalez highlights two Afro-Peruvian women’s groups who chose to organize from within the Movimento Negro because the women’s movement saw their demands as antifeminist or “reverse racist” (49).

María Lugones’s groundbreaking essay, “Colonialidade e gênero” (Coloniality and Gender), is central to the book, and it is cited repeatedly by most of the contributors. Lugones builds upon Anibal Quijano’s concept of the “coloniality of power” to make an argument for the modern/colonial system of gender (56). She discusses how coloniality permeates all aspects of social life, but that it is “insufficient to account for all aspects of gender” (60). This essay is followed by an essay by Oyèrónké Oyewùmí, whom Lugones cites in her work. Oyewùmí interrogates the concept of gender within African cultures, and critiques white feminist theory’s assumption of the universality of the nuclear family, which is often seen as alien in parts of Africa. Furthermore, Oyewùmí argues that seniority, rather than gender, was the most salient category in precolonial Yorùbá society.

The following two essays, by Dominican feminists Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso and Ochy Curiel, make bold arguments about the relationship between feminist theory from the Global North and the Global South. Using Latin America as a case study, Miñoso introduces the concept of the “coloniality of feminist reason,” and makes a methodological proposal for a “genealogy of experience” (98). She points out the harsh reality that “hegemonic feminisms of the North need the complicity of hegemonic feminisms of the South to continue the history of colonization and dependency” (99). Moreover, she boldly refers to Western modernity as “an imperialist, racist project of domination and death” (99). Finally, she critiques how Latin American feminists often try to adjust themselves to fit into theories produced in the United States and Europe, even though they come from different contexts that have been affected by coloniality in different ways (103). Similarly, Curiel’s essay posits that decolonial feminism “offers a new perspective of analysis to understand in a more complex way the relationships and intertwining of race, sex, sexuality, class, and geopolitics” (121). She critiques the fact that “European and North American theories, categories, and concepts are transported to our region without recontextualization, to analyze the realities of

many women who are converted into the objects of study of feminists with institutional and academic privileges, in addition to privileges of race, class, and sexuality” (124–25).

Curiel boldly calls Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality a “liberal and modern proposal” that is “defined from the modern Eurocentric western paradigm” (132). Finally, she argues that a decolonial feminist position recognizes that race, gender, class, heterosexuality, and so on are more than just axes of difference. Rather, they are “differentiations produced by oppression . . . that produce the modern colonial system” (133).

Finally, the two essays by Brazilian philosopher Susana de Castro and Algerian sociologist Marnia Lazreg offer critiques of representation in feminist thought. De Castro claims that though the decolonial turn had a significant impact on Latin American feminism (151), there is often a lack of intellectual engagement with Brazilian scholars on the topics of coloniality and modernity (152). Likewise, Lazreg critiques how well-intentioned social scientists and feminists have situated Algerian women as objects of study with a sense of “missionary zeal” (173), often representing them in a reductionist way that reproduces stereotypes of Muslim women.

The “Decolonial Practices” section opens with an important critical essay by Bolivian feminist Julieta Paredes Carvajal. She offers a definition of feminism rooted in the legacy and ancestry of the Aymara, Quechua, and Guaraní indigenous peoples of Bolivia, defining it as “the struggle and political proposal of the life of any woman anywhere in the world, in any stage of history, who has rebelled against the patriarchy that oppresses her” (195). Paredes discusses the origins of Western feminism as being based on either a “feminism of equality” or a “feminism of difference,” both of which emphasize individualism (196). She posits “community feminism” as an indigenous Latin American alternative that demystifies the *chacha-warmi* (man–woman) divide that “prevents an analysis of the lived reality of women” in Bolivia. Asserting that the *chacha-warmi* binary is sexist and hierarchical, she proposes the “complementary pair,” which is horizontal, nonhierarchical, harmonious, and reciprocal (199). Paredes also points out that the term *community* is not limited to rural or indigenous communities. Rather, she argues, “all human groups can make and build communities. It is an alternative proposal to the individualist society” (200).

In “Nossos Feminismos Revisitados” (Our Feminisms Revisited), Afro-Brazilian feminist social scientist Luiza Bairros raises a crucial question: “in a racist and sexist society marked by profound social inequalities, what could women of different racial groups and social classes have in common?” (208). After giving an overview of feminist attempts to define women based on the (supposedly) universal experiences of motherhood and sexual objectification (209), and asserting how socialist feminism and feminist standpoint theory has tried to overcome these limitations, Bairros outlines five themes that characterize the Black feminist point of view: “1) the legacy of a history of struggle; 2) the integrated nature of race, gender, and class; 3) combatting stereotypes or controlling images; 4) acting as mother-teachers and community leaders; 5) and sexual politics” (213).

I will briefly summarize a few of the essays in this section. The essay by Alba Magarita Aguinaga Barragán, Miriam Lang, Dunia Mokrani Chávez, and Alejandra Santillana offers an overview of feminist debates on development. The authors assert that women have always contributed to maintaining societies, and that feminists from the Global South “criticized the politics of development as a form of the continuation of colonialism” (224). Afro-Brazilian sociologist Angela Figueiredo’s essay takes the form of a letter written to Judith Butler, in which she discusses race relations in

Brazil. Figueiredo describes how *mulatas* in Brazil have been “constructed as a sexualized subject, responsible for the procreation of *mestiço* Brazilians” (253), and reflects on her own personal experiences of being classified as *parda* (Brown) at birth and later coming to identify as a Black woman. Afro-Colombian anthropologist María Elvira Díaz-Benítez’s essay outlines the impact that the election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in 2019 has had on feminist academics and activists, as well as on the sex workers’ movement in Brazil. For instance, anthropology professor Debora Diniz was the victim of death threats and compelled to flee the country due to her vocal support for abortion rights. Thula Rafaela de Oliveira Pires’s essay draws upon Lélia Gonzalez’s concept of *amefricanidade*, which “incorporates a whole historical process of intense cultural dynamics (adaptation, resistance, reinterpretation and creation of new forms) that is Afrocentric” to offer a more nuanced understanding of human rights (310). Claudia de Lima Costa’s essay argues that translation—both cultural and linguistic—“becomes a key element to forge decolonial feminist epistemologies” (323). Furthermore, she cites Aymara theorist Silvia Rivera Ciscanqui, who calls for the need to “develop an ethic and practice of decolonial translators” (335).

In Maria da Graça Costa’s important essay, “Agroecologia, ecofeminismos e bem viver: emergências decoloniais no movimento ambientalista brasileiro” (Agroecology, [Eco]Feminisms and “Bem Viver”: Decolonial Emergencies in the Brazilian Environmentalist Movement), the author describes how women from the countryside, indigenous women, and Black women began bringing their demands to the agroecological movement that emerged in the 2000s. Costa highlights the important role that organizations like Marcha das Margaridas and the Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas played in leading the mobilization for alternatives to agroc capitalist development (286). Moreover, she elaborates on the key concept of *bem viver* (Living Well), stating:

from the articulation between the agroecological movement and the feminist movement, the concept of “bem viver” has been claimed in speeches by leaders and movements as a form of constructing an alternative to the idea of anthropocentric capitalist development constituted by the arbitrary division between humanity and nature. “Bem viver” is a term that comes from the Quechua expression, *Suma Kawsay*. Previously restricted to the philosophy of Andean peoples, this expression gains . . . international visibility from the new Latin American constitutionalism and the greater expressiveness of South American indigenous leaders. (289)

Costa goes on to explain how the idea of *bem viver* counters the logic of *viver melhor*, a capitalist term that emphasizes the “freedom of one sector of society to consume more and more, to the detriment to the majority” (290). *Bem viver*, on the other hand, refers to the “the right of everyone to dignity, to subsistence, and to a healthy environment” (290). Drawing upon her doctoral research with rural women during the Marcha das Margaridas in 2015, Costa ponders the centrality of children and food that she witnessed in these meetings. Cuisine, she argues, is “one of the great strategies for mobilization of these groups” (294). Costa also introduces the term *feminismo periférico* (peripheral feminism), which describes the struggles of women from low-income, peripheral neighborhoods. Peripheral feminism emerges from a “subaltern gaze” and claims “a Latin American feminism that necessarily considers the intersections of class and race in what it refers to as social inequalities” (291). Ultimately, Costa argues, “the articulation between agroecology and feminisms, from a decolonial perspective,

can help us to construct a common policy of Bem Viver that . . . can allow us to build a humanity in other terms” (295). As a scholar of Afro-Brazilian feminist movements, I was struck by this historicization of the concept of *bem viver*, which has also been taken up by Black feminists in their national marches since 2018 (that is, the *Marcha das Mulheres Negras contra o Racismo, Violência e pelo Bem Viver*). This stellar essay could have been strengthened even more by including a more comprehensive reflection on how this concept has affected and influenced nonindigenous groups in Brazil and beyond.

The final section of the book, “Other Languages: Three Brazilian Artists,” features the artwork of Adriana Varejão, Rosana Paulino, and Marcela Cantuária. Varejão’s series, *Filho Bastardo* (1992) and *Filho Bastardo II-Cena de Interior* (1995) features an open wound that represents the violence of colonization. Paulino’s installation, *Assentamento*, shows a naked, enslaved, Black woman from a photograph that is placed on fabric. Another installation, *Parede da memória*, consists of 1,500 small charms with old photos of Black people. Buarque de Hollanda argues that this is a denunciation of the invisibility of Black people. Cantuária has a very interesting piece called *Voltarei e serei milhões* (I will return, and I will be millions), which is a quote from the Incan leader Tupac Amaru. In this piece, Afro-Brazilian politician, sociologist, and feminist Marielle Franco, who was assassinated in March 2018, is seated on a grand chair usually reserved for *mães-de-santo* (elder priestesses in the Afro-Brazilian religion, *candomblé*). Her legs are spread wide in a masculine position, there is a Black panther at her feet, and she is holding a staff with the head of Wilson Witsel, former governor of Rio de Janeiro. In the introduction, Buarque de Hollanda analyzes the work of these artists, referring to Varejão as an artist who most represents decolonial thought in Brazil. Although I appreciated that this volume included art as decolonial feminist texts that one can analyze on par with the written word, I would have liked to see the artists’ works throughout the book, rather than being relegated to the end. Doing this could have more effectively shown the connections between the artists’ work and the essays.

Overall, this collection of decolonial feminist thought from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, published in Portuguese, not only makes an important intervention into feminist philosophy, but it also challenges the language barriers and transnational boundaries that often divide feminist scholars around the world.

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