

New subjects for new discussions on domestic violence and women's agency

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***Summary.** In February 2011, the CIRSDe – Interdisciplinary Centre for Women's Studies and research at the University of Turin organized the international Conference "World Wide Women: Globalization, Gender, Languages". One of the sessions of the Conference deals with the issue of violence and women's agency. In this contribution I will present some key issues that have been discussed by a number of contributions that focused on the specific issue of domestic violence in relation to the new phenomena of globalization. The first point refers to the issue of "definitions" or "re-definitions" that the new multicultural and new repositioning of gender relations require from us. The other major issue deals with the relationship between violence and globalization.*

Key words: *gender, violence, globalization*

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In February 2011, the CIRSDe[~] Interdisciplinary Centre for Women Studies and research at the University of Turin organized the international Conference “World Wide Women: Globalization, Gender, Languages”.

One of the sessions of the Conference dealt with the issue of violence and women’s agency.

Here I present some key issues that have been put in place by a number of contributions published in the e-book *World Wide Women: Globalization, Gender, Languages – Vol. 2* (Balsamo, 2011a) that focused on the specific issue of domestic violence in relation to the new phenomena of globalization.

A first point not only theoretical but also of political relevance refers to the issues of “definitions” or “re-definitions” that the new multicultural and new repositioning in gender relations require (Bimbi, 2011; Carnino, 2011; D’Odorico & Vianello, 2011).

While the feminist world developed post-structuralist, queer, post-colonial theories and de-structured the subject thanks to focusing on gender (Butler, 1990; Carnino, 2011; Hooks, 1982; Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1990; Mohanty, 1991, 1993; Preciado, 2007; Spivak, 1988), the majority of studies and research aimed at statistical consistency. Gender-based violence continued to rely on an interpretive paradigm built around the binary polarization: women and men, with the underlying “essentialist” idea of sexual differences, or with a naïve adherence to the cultural construction of difference as “natural” (Carnino, 2011; Corradi, 2008).

This impermeability of empirical research in the development of feminist studies risks legitimizing discourses which, instead of questioning, reproduce dominant hierarchies of power.

From the poststructuralist and queer feminisms perspective, this binary system men/women created by the sex/gender system is at the base of femicide and any kind of violence against women, since it reduces everything to a hierarchy between a plurality of combinations of bodies and sexual orientation (Carnino, 2011, Preciado, 2007).

Re-conceptualizing gender violence means giving up on a «reassuring» research framework which identifies, with apparent ease, «victims» and «executioners» on the basis of the difference between men and women, in favor of a permanent redefinition of violence as a principle of power whose historical configurations are constantly changing.

The other major issue in the field is in regards to the relationship between violence and globalization. More than one paper presented at the Conference was geared towards the redefinition of terminologies and tools that are used in social practices, in services for women as well as in research, to enable «other» meanings, and raise questions not only of

linguistic translation but also of creating space for free and creative expression and for the right to citizenship of individuals (Bimbi, 2011; D'Odorico & Vianello, 2011).

Violence meets migration and the culturally variant local society composite. With global migrations, new individuals enter the environment, and it is fundamental to redefine representations of violence taken for granted and assumed as universal even by WHO standards (World Health Organization and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010; World Health Organization, 2005): we have to be vigilant of violence and use a language that can be understood by the new players involved, including a semantic reconstruction and narratives of violence in new contexts of our multicultural society.

Again, at a theoretical level we have developed post-colonial and intersectionality studies (on class, gender & ethnicity) (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). With the studies on violence taking on these new dimensions (Balsamo, 2011; Bimbi, 2011,).

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