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IDENTITY MODELS AND MATERNITIES FOR MEXICAN WOMEN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Abstract: This article is a fragment of the socioethnographic research called Gender Ideologies and Migrant Mexican Women in the United States. The contents that are discussed are produced from the discourses of first-generation migrant women settled in southern California, USA. The “identity models” mentioned in the document were designed to appreciate variations in the self-perceptions of the women interviewed, based on their maternity experiences, with the understanding of being able to approach their ideological bases. For purposes of categorizing and carrying out the corresponding analytical work, three identity models were designed: the “Traditional Identity Model”; the “Identity Model in transition” and the Identity Model of the conversations”, which are defined in subsequent sections. One of the underlying premises of this analysis is the consideration that human identities are in constant transition, therefore, contradictory discourses are frequent. Fragments of some answers from the interviewees are presented, which show elements that can be classified according to the identity models mentioned. The conclusion of this discussion exalts the Mexican cultural atavisms of the patriarchal culture that are maintained despite time and physical distance from the places of origin. The material presented was obtained through research to obtain a PhD degree in the field of Social Sciences and Gender Studies.

Keywords: Gender Theory. Identity model. Maternity, patriarchal system.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural fact of “naturalizing” motherhood, due to its only biological origin, has contributed to a great extent to standardize its senses, its meanings and its obligatory nature. Hence, each maternity is denied, as an absolutely individual, unique, intimate and private process.

For the purposes of this analysis we can understand by culture, and even more precisely, by Mexican culture, the proposal of Marcela Lagarde that is expressed as follows:

“Mexican culture is a space for the confrontation of trends of change and advancement of women, but its macho, misogynistic and homophobic foundations are not only traditional, but also have current aspects, totally XXI century. Even advanced and democratic men or those who show sympathy for the different and are in favor of equality, are not in favor of equality, equity and generic democracy. And, as long as they do not state otherwise, they start from a gender supremacy that they consider legitimate and vindicate it, before the slightest hint of the individual or collective cause of women” (Lagarde, 2014:332).

In Mexican culture, women and their maternity hospitals have begun to move in a “continuum” from tradition to conversion; that is to say, in the transition from the sufferings caused by the patriarchal system, towards the construction and adoption of ideologies that distance them every day from being for others. It could then be assumed that this mobility would be “facilitated” in contexts that are conducted, in general, under broad criteria of respect and tolerance, recognition of women as equals and with the exercise of a democratic citizenship characteristic of first worlds, a specific case of the United States of America.

However, the cultural condition is carried in the framework of beliefs, in the imaginaries, in the traditions, in the bodies, in the ideals. Maternity possibly constitutes one of the most studied and controversial human phenomena, indisputably the most experienced.

The work presented below is based on a fragment of the discussion of the doctoral thesis called “Transitions in Gender Ideologies. Migrant Mexican women in the United States. The evocations permeated in the stories presented are about them, their

sexuality, their maternity and their willingness to open their intimacy.

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the study was to explore possible transitions in Gender Ideologies in first-generation migrant Mexican women living in Los Angeles County, California, United States.

Gender theory constituted a transversal axis in the study. The approach denies the predetermination of the “being and being” of a person, according to her sexual anatomy and physiology as a fixed nature. So, to call an ideological system¹ of Gender, was to refer to those constructs that each of the women interviewed has formed and that has led them to position themselves as women in various situations and contexts.

It is worth mentioning that the point of reference to appreciate such evolutions or ideological permanences was based on his Mexican models of his upbringing. That for the purpose of the aforementioned investigation, one who is inscribed in the patriarchal model is considered as such.

In order to establish guidelines that account for these female thought systems in transition, three axes were proposed for exploration and analysis under the name of Strategic Identities; understood as three stages of a discourse on Gender:

The traditional discourse that must be answered and that constitutes the Traditional Gender Ideology. Its categories are inscribed in the “natural” order, that is, in the patriarchal

model.²

The discourse whose contents denote evident mutation, is constituted in the Gender Ideology in Transition. Its categories fit both those of the “natural” order and those of non-social assignment, therefore, its state is one of tension.

The third is the discourse of the converts, which constitutes the Gender Ideology of the “converts”. Its categories escape natural explanations or those given by “destiny”. One speaks then of active agents.

The Gender analyzes were conformed within a theoretical fabric that included, mainly, the proposals of Bourdieu (2003) on symbolic systems; the habitus³ as an articulator of subjective-objective processes. The constructs elaborated by Marcela Lagarde and Martha Lamas, allowed to give consistency to the interpretations about women and Gender.

The research was methodologically oriented from a qualitative paradigm. The field work was carried out with 10 migrant Mexican women for 12 consecutive months. The basic inclusion criteria were: having been born and living somewhere in the Mexican Republic for the first 18 years of his life; have migrated and established their place of permanent residence in United States territory and have the experience of biological motherhood and foster care. The techniques used were in-depth interviews and life stories.

1. An ideological system is a form of knowledge and recognition of realities, which works through devices; they have their own logic, values and symbols and thus allow knowing, acknowledging or ignoring elements of the environment that feeds them. (Dumont, 1996).

2. In the opinion of Bourdieu (1999), speaking of a “natural” order or “naturalization” processes implies turning our gaze to the domination that is exercised through the modes of perception, appreciation and action that women have incorporated and that relegate them to a subordinate position. This is symbolic domination, the most insidious (and invisible) dimension of male domination..

3. “Habitus”, a concept created and defined by Bourdieu as a set of enduring and transposable systems of schemes of perception, appreciation and action resulting from the institution of the social in bodies or in biological individuals. (Bourdieu, 1977).

THE COMPLETENESS OF "THE FEMININE"

Martha Lamas, in a magnificent work called "Holy Little Mother", cites two questions from Sibilla Aleramo, an Italian feminist writer from the second half of the 19th century: "Why do we adore sacrifice in motherhood? Where did this inhuman idea of maternal immolation come from? From mother to daughter, for centuries, servitude is transmitted" (Lamas, 1995).

And Lamas continues his speech:

"Suffering appears as indispensable to maternal love, as if the pains of childbirth would make motherhood dizzy forever as a painful experience. Despite the elements that articulate the maternal figure as omnipotent, the myth favors a victim mentality that homologates motherhood, love, service, victimization. The social valuation of women as mothers and the level of narcissistic gratification that deeply compensates them, facilitate the acceptance of the mothers themselves of the myth impregnated with sacrifice and victimization" (p. 223).

In the traditional gender category, content that alludes to and responds to the patriarchal model stands out. Said by Lagarde, "women are defined in society and in the State by an oppressive order of private property of people and their products. Women's lives, even now, are regulated and directed by "others" and reduce them to "captivity" (Lagarde, 1994:19).

A fragment of the life stories of migrant women that evokes the patriarchal tradition is: "To feel fulfilled as a woman being a mother".

- "Motherhood has been something very beautiful, for me. I have fulfilled myself as a woman with my children, it has been something very beautiful. A very beautiful experience, when my children were born is one of the most beautiful moments that I remember, the most beautiful that I have had, like the day I got married (laughs). It

was like a dream, I remember myself like a dream and so the birth of each one of my children, they were all born in the United States. Each of them their birth is the same as when I got married. I remember that the same" (Source: Zacatecas).

- "Ayyyyy motherhood has meant everything to me, everything! How will I tell him? I feel fulfilled as a woman giving life to another being, that being has grown and they have learned both good and bad from me, but since they are grown now I feel very proud because I know that my children are good. That all these years of everything have been worth it, because I see my children who are well focused" (Source: Chihuahua).

For Lagarde (2001), female sexuality has two vital spaces that are eroticism and procreation. Maternity is built around procreation as a basic "natural" life experience, as a component of women's lives; as the basic center of her femininity, of her "nature". This way, female procreation is being registered as a duty, as an "act" that cannot be renounced because it possesses the "natural" characteristic. Somehow, for traditional ideological conceptions, being a mother becomes synonymous with being a woman (p.p. 22).

In turn, Bourdieu (2003) does not contradict the previous idea. He suggests that it is not that the needs of biological reproduction determine the symbolic organization of the sexual division of labor and, progressively, of the entire natural and social order; rather, he considers that it has been an arbitrary social construction of the biological and especially of the female and male bodies, of their functions and their customs, particularly of biological reproduction that usually provides an apparently natural foundation to the androcentric vision of the division of sexual activity and of the sexual division of labor, and

from there of the entire cosmos (p. 76).

THE DISINTERIORIZATION OF MOTHERHOOD. WALKING IN TRANSITION

In the identity model in transition, its categories are found in fluctuations between the traditional order and that of the converts. At times, their speeches contradict each other. Here are some fragments of the life stories of migrant women: *“To have fewer children than the mother”*.

- “I didn’t want to get married girl, because there were many married fifteen-year-olds aged 18, 19, I didn’t want what my mom would happen to me, messing with the bunch of kids. I had my children, the ones I thought I was keeping alone, that’s why I had them. The oldest, then at six years the other and at eight the other. I had her the first time and I said well, I’m married with one, but I’m not sure of marriage. And I said, if she left me or not, she left me with one wherever I want, I will fit. Then I said, well, the second, I think I didn’t fight so much with someone else because my daughter was already in her first year at school. The third one was due to their pressure and worse than that I didn’t want to have a family of two, I wanted to have a family of three. The accident room, menopause -laughs-. And thank God it helped me. It was that I didn’t want to get married early, it’s because I didn’t want to have the life that my mom led.” (Source: Chihuahua).

Maternity as a historical-social institution, axis of cultural and hegemonic productions and reproductions and one of the areas par excellence of the sense of “being a woman” for large groups of Mexican women, is one of the axes whose transformations entail greater

representation to denote transitions in gender ideologies. Having the ability to perceive oneself based on one’s own life story and in comparison with other maternity models, especially with the mother herself, is the result not only of external stimuli that drive her, but of exercising her own decision-making and various empowerment processes.

Modification of thoughts due to school processes⁴.

- “Ahhh no, now I am very different, just with my daughter, since I was a little girl I already talked a lot with her and I had a lot of communication with her why,... because I went to parenting classes, when my children were born I went to parenting classes. So I already had the education to speak to her face to face and bluntly and put the points on the table and tell her this happens, this happens, and you are a girl, and you are going to take care of yourself, and you are going to look for your future so that she is a prepared girl and knows what is good and what is bad. Already very different. Since I had more communication, I already had more preparation. For the boys, it’s the same to put all the issues on the table and let them choose if they want the real one, or the crooked one. So I’ll tell you, everything is very different from what I went through” (Source: Zacatecas).
- “So how can I say I’ve had a full sex life? No! I think that perhaps it is part of what I have that does not help, education, partly that did not touch me. Because when I told my dad that his marriage was going to turn out well and he said: no, they’re all easy, etc. etc And I told him no, I’m going to show you..., he told me, if he didn’t make you fall before, it’s because you have a stupid boyfriend-laughs-, if you

4. It is recognized that, thanks to education, - understood as the sum of school processes that were voluntarily accessed -, there is a personal repositioning before their erotic world and they are able to notice their differences of thought and practices towards direct relatives.

understand me? “ (Source: Jalisco).

- “The sexuality class in high school helped me, about sperm rising and all that, it helped me. So me, if I’m protected, nothing happens” (Source: Michoacán).
- “Over time, with talks, with friendships, even if you don’t talk, many times you don’t comply well because you’re not an expert in that. So little by little I have been improving, now a little more with the talk and with the school you already demand. I think that it was also partly the fault of the education I had from my upbringing. And now that’s what I’m telling you, right now you know your body better” (Source: Baja California).

Bourdieu, within his analysis of male domination (2002:111-114), acknowledges the effects that the great critical work of the feminist movement has had in certain regions of the social space. This feminist work has managed to break reinforcing circles of the patriarchal model installed in female minds and bodies.

Among the most representative evidence of the transformations in female conditions is the greater access to secondary education and the upper secondary level (associated of course with other factors related to salaried work, distancing from domestic chores and reproductive functions). So, the increase of women with access to education considered formal, and beyond basic institutional education, can be considered as one of the most important factors that influence the transition of women of Mexican origin, as a basic factor of change.

Discuss openly about sexuality with their descendants.

- “Over time I have realized that with your children you can talk and you can offer them and you can be there guiding them. In the sexual, I have learned the same. Of

the guys, there are people who are receptive and people who don’t like to broach the subject. Among my children, among my four boys, I have all the characters that exist, from the open one who can tell me how many orgasms she had, to this boy who doesn’t want to know anything about sex because he says he’s not interested in talking to me. Not that I want to approach him, if I wanted to approach him he closes, he doesn’t want to. And then neither do I. I am a mom who respects individuality, I respect his privacy, if he doesn’t want to talk to me then just be careful, that has its dangers... but I’m not going to intimidate him” (Source: Zacatecas).

Seen from an anthropological perspective, it is possible to include this indicator within the transition processes in gender identities. So, if it is possible to speak of transformations in sexuality that occur at the level of social relations of kinship and alliance - as Marcela Lagarde says -, in maternity and in filial relations. All this on the threshold of feminine changes regarding her recognition as a woman differentiated from others; the reorganization of her domestic functions and responsibilities, as well as the ability to recognize individual differences within her family group (Lagarde, 2005).

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

Any conclusion about motherhood is plural. It is indisputable that the masculine discourse in its various aspects, - ecclesiastical, legal or medical -, has always sought to direct the woman, the mother. This has happened at all times, but in contemporary times we have to look for a new element, which is not so much freedom, but awareness.

Although the economic, work or simply the inertia of mentality variables continue to be important aspects when it comes to having a child, it is observed that women have been

increasingly lucid in the face of motherhood, have reflected on their feelings and have analyzed the derivations inherent in becoming mothers” (Moreno and Mira, 2004).

The omnipresence of the maternal figure in the accounts of the interviewees was general and forceful. Motherhood is configured as an unbreakable and unalterable link, present from one generation to another. Not all the stories expressed positive content to the maternal image, but finally marked their routes when they became women - mothers.

There was a predominance of the consideration of “maternal love” as an element given to the feminine condition, to the condition of being a woman and to the assumed assumption of not questioning the performance styles of maternity (when the interviewees referred to their respective parents).

The representations that motherhood has - pigeonholing them from the patriarchal culture - are imprinting on ideologies a way of being a woman through them, of caring for and serving others even in the absence of the same biological fact of procreation.

The women interviewed appeared, on the one hand, as cohesive axes of families and, on the other, as representatives and transmitters of a Mexican culture geographically left in

another territory, but which is maintained with great pride.

Thus, the representation of maternity is doubly reinforced for being considered one of the main feats within US contexts, where the costs of migration tend to focus on “absences.”

Therefore, to move towards new considerations around maternity itself is to confront the ideas of forced submissions, naturalized for women, such as the acceptance of a pregnancy-delivery-rearing of children, as a result of a sexual encounter.

The mission to search for personal growth that goes beyond the learned sensations of incompleteness and of being for others, is latent.

As Lagarde (2014) opines, “the female captive incompleteness is expressed in the possibility of modifying the personal limits of the woman in relation to others and in many circumstances in her virtual existence” (p. 390).

Maternity with its historical - cultural burden, center of productions and reproductions and endower of the sense of being a woman for extensive groups of Mexican women, implies an axis whose transformations entail greater representation to denote transitions in Gender Ideologies.

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