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Which 'Mountain' Must Feminism Climb?: Challenges for Feminist Alliances between Migrant and Autochthonous Women's Groups in the Basque Country¹

By Itziar Gandarias Goikoetxea²

Abstract

Within a post-colonial framework, this paper explores the possibilities and difficulties of feminist alliances among migrant women and autochthonous feminist groups in Basque Country. In particular, it focuses on a close reading of one metaphor that emerged in a joint meeting between the groups: "the metaphor of the mountain". Using Nayak's (2014) methodology of the 'political activism of close reading practice', it examines the implications of the metaphor in the creation of political alliances. This is an active metaphor that exemplifies the dialectic between the universality of the patriarchal subjugation of women and the recognition of the specificity and diversity of women's lived experiences. The metaphor locates feminist groups in different positions depending on the level of "feminist development" and calls for a decolonization of feminism that involves not only the processes of cultural alienation of women at the margins, but the uncovering of the superiority of mainstream Western feminism. The paper suggests that the construction of feminist alliances within a postcolonial context should take into account the inequalities, positions of power and privileges that women occupy while, at the same time, building politics of intimacies and encounters that encourage ethical dialogue.

Keywords: Basque country, feminist alliances, migrant women, post-coloniality.

Introduction

"An otherness barely touched upon and that already moves away"
(Julia Kristeva, 1991:3).

¹ This work has been conducted within the framework of the Doctoral program in Person and Society in the Contemporary World at the Social Psychology Department in Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain. The goal of the thesis is research about the possibilities, limits and tensions in the fabric of feminist alliances between autochthonous feminist and migrant women organizations in Basque Country. The author would like to thank to the professors Surya Nayak and Joan Pujol for their supervision and grateful comments during the work in progress of this paper.

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Debates on the definition of the subject of feminism and the development of a common political agenda that, at the same time, recognize difference and multiplicity, have populated feminist theory and practice in the last two decades (Scott, 1988; Fuss, 1989). On the one hand, western feminism can no longer escape the importance of the intersectional experience of difference outside of white, heterosexual and bourgeois women (Davis, 1981; Lorde, 1981; hooks, 1984; Bhavnani & Coulson, 1986; Anthias, 1998; Brah, 1996; Mohanty & Alexander 1997, Crenshaw, 1989). This deconstruction of the essentialist readings of the category “woman” has recognized the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the feminist subject, favoring a positional understanding where being a woman is a contingent locality within a changing historical context susceptible of being politically transformed (Alcoff, 1988, Anthias, 2002, Nash 2008). Moreover, this openness of the category “woman” advocates resistance to an addition and subtraction configuration of identity and experience giving way to the relevance of “politics of location” (Boyce Davies, 2004:153; Kaplan, 1994), the “matrix of domination” of Hill Collins (2000:228) and the theory of intersectionality in relation to “mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (Crenshaw:1989:133).

On the other hand, the multiplicity of subject positions and the questioning of a ‘common oppression of all women’ lead to the development of divergent and potentially conflicting political agendas within the feminist movement. For some feminists, the lack of a unified political subject and the consequent difficulty in defining a common political agenda can fragment and weaken the feminist movement (Genz, 2006).

The feminization of migration (Anthias, 2000, Yinger, 2006, Labadi-Jackson, 2008) is one of the areas that makes this debate even more pertinent and urgent. Migrant and local women have quite different social, cultural and economic contexts. While a common political agenda may be difficult, issues affecting migrant women³ should be taken into consideration if we want to achieve any significant transformation in precarious life conditions (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Anthias & Lazaridis, 2000; Kofman, 2004; Nash, 2005; Montenegro, Montenegro, Yufra & Galaz, 2009). In this context, the challenge of forming feminist political alliances that create ‘patterns for relating across our human differences as equals’ (Lorde 1980:115) is nowadays one the most important feminist request.

This paper takes the notions of the activism of black feminist theory (Nayak, 2014) and “post”-colonial feminisms (hooks, 2000; Mendoza, 2002; Mohanty and Alexander, 2003; Anzaldúa, 2007), as the fabric where difference and commonality could be sewed together to transcend notions of a ‘global sisterhood’ (Morgan, 1984). Instead of ignoring differences between women, romanticizing feminist global relationships or assuming oppressive ‘essential’ distinctions between so called ‘First’ and ‘Third’ World women, Black feminist and “post”-colonial feminisms ‘develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change’ (Lorde, 1980:115). Chandra T. Mohanty (2003) suggests that the dialectic of “common differences” can constitute the ground of a deep solidarity to confront unequal power relations within feminist positions. She argues that “the focus is not just on the intersections of race, class, gender, nation, and sexuality in different communities of women but on mutuality and co-implication, which suggests attentiveness to the interweaving of the histories of these communities.” (Mohanty, 2003: 522). In the same way, the activism of Black feminist theory (Lorde 1984, hooks, 2000; Hill Collins, 2000) insists on the power of collective action founded on ‘the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences’ (Lorde, 1979:111).

³ There is no consensus on a single definition of a ‘migrant’. For this text, migrant women referred to women that made a movement into a new country to stay temporarily or to settle for a long-term (Anderson & Blinder, 2012).

Below, this text analyzes the metaphor of the mountain that arises in an encounter between migrant women and autochthonous feminist groups in Basque Country to open up and occupy the dialectic of difference; right after, it presents a close re-reading of the examined excerpt through the lens of positionality and ultimately, it offers proposals for the creation of feminist alliances across difference(s). In summary, this paper aims to problematize the (im)possibilities of a global feminist coalition rooted on women's differences and their effects and impacts in women everyday lives.

A brief cartography about Women migrants and Basque feminists groups

Compared with other European countries, immigration in Spain and Basque Country has increased in the last two decades (Blanco & Zlotnik, 2006). Immigration in Basque Country is comparatively small: 6.3 per cent of the total population, comparing to the 10.1 per cent in Spanish State (Ikuspegi, 2015). According to the data from 2016 year (table 1), more than half of foreign population in Basque Country are women (52%) and mostly of them come from Latin America (62,1%), following from Europe (49,2%), Asia (43,1%) and finally from Africa (36,4%).

Table 1: Foreign population in Basque Country, by geographical area and sex. 2016 (Provisional data)

	Total		Men		Women	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Europe Union 25 countries	21.476	11,4	11.552	53,8	9.924	46,2
Extension of Europe Union to 28	16.444	8,7	8.148	49,5	8.296	50,5
Total Europe Union	37.920	20,1	19.700	52,0	18.220	48,0
Rest of Europe	7.205	3,8	3.237	44,9	3.968	55,1
Total Europe	45.125	24,0	22.937	50,8	22.188	49,2
Maghreb	26.555	14,1	16.673	62,8	9.882	37,2
Rest of Africa	14.480	7,7	9.442	65,2	5.038	34,8
Total Africa	41.035	21,8	26.115	63,6	14.920	36,4
United Sates and Canada	1.709	0,9	824	48,2	885	51,8
Latin America	86.238	45,8	32.509	37,7	53.729	62,3
Total America	87.947	46,7	33.333	37,9	54.614	62,1
China	5.323	2,8	2.367	44,5	2.956	55,5
Rest of Asia	8.380	4,5	5.433	64,8	2.947	35,2
Total Asia	13.703	7,3	7.800	56,9	5.903	43,1
Oceania	403	0,2	221	54,8	182	45,2
Total	188.213	100,0	90.406	48,0	97.807	52,0

**The total is represented in vertical percentages and sex in horizontal
Source: INE- Institute of National Statistics of Spain. Production: Ikuspegi.*

This data illustrate the “care crisis” (Kofman and Raghuram, 2010; Hoffman and Buckley, 2013). During the last few decades, migrant women have increasingly had an important role in restoring the deficit of care and domestic labour that persist in many European households. The

lack of family conciliation policies and childcare facilities and increases in the longevity of the European elderly population indicate this care deficit (Koser & Lutz, 1998; Williams, 2001). The demand of women for marriage, as domestic employees or as sexual workers, in rich and industrialized countries with legal or illegal status, is being held by migrant women; shaping what Saskia Sassen (2003:19) has called “new classes of servitude”.

Once in the North, female migrants tend to stay longer than male migrants do (Leon, 2010). Moreover, when looking at the social participation of migrant women in Basque Country, 9% of migrant women state that they have joined at least one association (Ikuspegi, 2009). They prefer organizations comprised of people from the same country rather than those associations of immigrants from diverse origins, and are particularly interested in those supporting political parties that support pro-immigrants policies (Sáez de la Fuente, 2008). The long working hours, illegal contracts, work instability and the responsibility of supporting children and relatives from their original countries constitute the most important difficulties (Del Rio, Dema & Gandarias, 2014) that prevent migrant women from taking part more actively in associative spaces.

In the only study dedicated entirely to exploring the association of migrant women in Basque Country, Amaia Unzueta and Trinidad Vicente (2011) identified sixteen migrant women’s associations, finding that the majority of them have been created in the last ten years. The oldest dates from 1997. The authors offer two explanations for this phenomenon. First, women migrants have arrived over the last decade; second, to actively participate in collective movements requires some stability, which normally only is obtained after a few years from after arrival (Unzueta & Trinidad, 2011). Moreover, they found that the sixteen associations run their activities primarily to meet the practical needs of migrant women (social and labor counseling, legal advice and providing support networks). In that sense, these spaces fill a gap not met by autochthonous and feminist organizations which have not considered in their political agendas, the demands of migrant women. Instead, immigrant associations report on migration policies and claims for fair wages for domestic and care workers (Sipi, 2000).

Unzueta and Vicente’s study (2011) identify three migrant groups⁴ that have taken part in the current thesis research: Women of World, located in Bilbao, Garaipen located in Gipuzkoa, and Safa, a Muslim women’s group situated in the village of Eibar.

The feminist movement in Basque Country has been clearly marked by the political context in which it was born: the democratic movement against the dictatorship of Franco in the mid-70s (Castells, 1999). At that time, Basque feminists organized around “Feminists Assemblies of Euskadi” (Zabala, 2008:22) This is an autonomous movement that housed different women’s groups from different towns and villages of Basque Country and that came together later in provincial assemblies. Currently, the only active women’s assembly is Bizkaia⁵, which is one of the organizations that participates in the dialogue analyzed in this text.

In the 80s, there was a suspension of activism and new groups that emerged were linked to Basque national liberation. Aizan and Egizan are one of the new groups that grew up in that period (Epelde, Aranguren & Retolaza, 2015). However, later, in 2002, the Bilgune Feminist collective⁶

⁴ Women of the World: is a women’s organization that promotes empowerment and the emotional meeting of women with different personal, social and cultural history. Garaipen, is a feminist women’s group constituted by Basque and migrant women gathered for social and multicultural leadership. Safa is an association whose main objective is to provide training to Muslim women and promote their empowerment.

⁵ Feminist Assembly of Bizkaia” is a feminist women’s organization based in Bilbao and with a history of struggle over 35 years for the rights of women.

⁶ Bilgune Feminista is a nationwide Basque feminist organization born in 2002 that fight for one sovereign and feminist Basque Country.

was born. This group is made up mostly of young women who work nationwide with local assemblies in Basque villages and cities.

Finally in the 2000s, the influences of queer and transfeminist movements took hold; new groups appeared on the scene, further challenging the notion of the woman subject and breaking down gender dichotomies. The collective Medeak,⁷ created in the beginning of 2000 represents this movement.

There is a lack of articulations and joint actions between migrant women and autochthonous Basque feminists, as various authors have pointed (Martinez, 2008). One linkage is noteworthy, however. This is the unique experience of the Coordinator of LGTBI activists from San Sebastian, who ran between 2009 and 2011, and the migrant women collective Garaipen, the above cited transfeminist group Medeak, the Bilgune Feminist organization and Ehgam,⁸ a gay and lesbian group. The commitment was to work jointly against heterosexism and colonialism, understanding that both systems of oppression are intertwined. Other than this experience of collaboration across feminist groups, joint actions are reduced to specific, cross-fertilizing activities. (Gandarias and Pujol, 2013). In this sense, this text responds to this lacuna, exploring spaces of intersection between the struggles and demands of migrant women and Basque feminists.

“Climbing the mountain” of feminist liberation in Basque Country

This text is part of thesis research conducted in Basque Country beginning in 2012. Its aim is to explore the possibilities and difficulties of feminist alliances between different women’s organizations and, in particular, between migrant women and autochthonous feminist groups. The purpose is to offer some insight on the difficulties in developing a collective feminist project that involved women from different national origins. Interviews and participant observation are used within an ethnographic approach.

The following excerpt is part of an interview for the research and describes an interaction in a meeting between the migrant women’s organization Women of World, created in 2000 and constituted by local and migrant women and the local feminist group “Feminist Assembly of Bizkaia” created in 1976. As it was pointed out above, their joint actions were limited to specific activities to organize punctual actions but these weren’t long-lasting and stable alliances. Precisely, due to the absence of stable and lasting alliances between different women over time, the meeting was an initial endeavor between the two organizations to map the necessary steps for building common political actions. The encounter was organized with a positive and constructive attitude in order to transform the segregation of the groups. During the meeting, the metaphor of “climbing the mountain” was used to refer to the difficulties and efforts of joint feminist action. A migrant woman from Latin America interviewed for the research, that took part in that meeting, told the event in this way:

“One woman (from the group of autochthonous women) told us: ‘Well, I’m going to wait for you down the mountain’. One of our companions (immigrant women’s organization) replied ‘who can assure you that we will go down at the same point where you are, or that there are other possible roads, other paths by which to go? Why do we have to arrive to the same place where you arrived? In the process of

⁷ Medeak is a radical feminist group born in 2000 that places the body at the center of its political action and commitment to transfeminism as a political proposal.

⁸ Ehgam is an organization fighting since 1977 for the liberation of gays and lesbians in Basque Country.

climbing the mountain a lot of things can happen: I can get lost, I can find myself back, I can see a new or easier way, I may stop, step back... and end in a different place that I thought. There is not a single way to climb and get down from the mountain, there are many options'. I would had told 'It's good that you wait for us, We'll meet you there!', because I'm more easygoing, and this makes me accommodate to the situation, but afterwards it is true that I realize that the processes are deeper."

The mountain metaphor used during the meeting is not an arbitrary one. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980:18) "metaphors are rooted in physical and cultural experience, they are not randomly assigned". As Bauman and Briggs (1990) stated, the communicative function of an utterance is relative to its location and emerges within a particular social setting. In this case, the mountain metaphor belongs to the physicality of the geography of Basque Country, a country where the mountain has a significant presence geographically and even more socio-historically. On the one hand, mountains are one of the symbols of Basque country's historical resistance against outside invasions that helped maintain the Basque culture and language. On the other hand, mountains have broad meaning in the social Basque imaginary where many social and cultural activities are developed around the mountains including a wide culture of hiking. Because metaphors are not just a matter of language or a mere words, they re-describe the reality (Ricoeur, 1979), and make sense of our experience providing "coherent structure, highlighting something and hiding others" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 139), this article emphasizes the study of metaphors as a powerful social analysis, through which hidden and unsaid elements of speech become accessible.

Critical reading of the feminist mountain metaphor

Picking up on Nayak's (2014) methodology of the "activism of Black feminist re-reading practices" it is possible to examine and do a close reading of the mountain as a metaphor for one of the most difficult knots of feminist practice, namely, how to create political alliances across differences.

To put into practice a close reading methodology is to go beyond a literary textual analysis, taking the Kristeva's idea of "intertextuality as intersubjectivity" (1969:37) which proposes that "the space and place between words function as the space and place between people, ideologies, representation and subjectivities" (Nayak, 2014:20). Following Nayak's (2014) methodology, function, position, significance, constitution and configuration of the gaps between the words of this fragment, are examined.

As a method, the practice of close reading incorporates a detailed and critical deconstruction of the function and production of the text (Nayak, 2014). For Derrida (1992), words naturally refer to or "reference" other words and there is a perpetual tension that constitutes them. In this paper the tension in the relationality of the words is, as Kristeva (1969) points out, the tension in the relationality between the different women of the groups. In other, words, the space and place between the words in this fragment are analyzed as the space, place and distance between migrant women and autochthonous feminist in their daily life.

The particular aim in this analysis is to re-read the three voices that appear in the excerpt from the meeting in order to ascertain the political and material effects produced in and through their discourse, attending to what is hidden or unsaid. The idea is to use the activism of Black

feminist re-reading practices (Nayak, 2014) to uncover the social and psychological border mechanisms that produce forms of exclusion and subordination. The point is, these borders operate within feminism and thus it is important to examine how the function and production of borders constrain feminist alliances across differences. The activism of Black feminist re-reading practices questions the function and production of borderlines and “utilize the space in between constructed binaries” (Nayak, 2014:21).

The goal is not to categorize or essentialize the voices within the excerpt; the three voices constitute different and at times contradictory aspects of subjectivity. In stark contrast to models of fix identities based on segregation and fragmentation the challenge is to “integrate all the parts of who I am” (Lorde, 1980:120) and “learn to lie down with the different parts of ourselves” (Abod, 1987:158).

First position: “Well, I’m going to wait for you down the mountain”

This first utterance makes a distinction between the ones that need to climb the mountain and those who have already done it. In this context, the mountain is a metaphor for the set of constraints that women must fight for their emancipation, assuming that autochthonous women are in a better position than their migrant counterparts. Migrant women have to ‘catch up’ and get to the position of autochthonous women; mostly referring to the relationship with men and the assimilation of patriarchal values.

The somatic norm and the Third World Difference

The metaphor of waiting down the mountain locates autochthonous women as the “natural” leaders and occupants of the process, representing what Nirmal Puwar states the “somatic norm” (Puwar, 2004: 8). In theory, all women can climb the mountain of feminism, however, a close re-reading of ‘I’m going to wait for you down the mountain’ marks the bodies of migrant women as being “out of place” (Puwar, 2004: 8). Indeed, the inference is that migrant women are not only ‘out of place’ but also would benefit from following the path trodden by the autochthonous women – a path that is apparently faster and smarter. A close re-reading of ‘I’m going to wait for you down the mountain’ assumes a single and universal evolutionary process for the feminist project. For Nirmal Puwar, on the grounds of whiteness, white women are the disavowed somatic norm reinforcing the complicity with normative cultures:

“The extent to which their whiteness grants them a certain level of ‘ontological complicity’ with normative institutional cultures, even while they are, on the grounds of gender and possibly class, ‘space invaders’, remains hidden” (2004: 10).

The assumed supremacy of the autochthonous position in relation to the migrant woman is emphasized by the words ‘I’m going to wait for you’ reinforcing the migrant position as “needy” (Juliano, 2004) or, in Mohanty’s (2003) terms, as “Third World Woman” that need to be saved by and learn from enlightened western feminists. Mohanty et al. explain how such feminist approaches often proceed through producing ‘third world women’ as objects of knowledge in the following way:

“An analysis of ‘sexual difference’ in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive or homogeneous notion of what I call the ‘third world difference’”(1991:53). In other words, the

'third world difference' is a production and function of Western understanding of gender oppression taking the West as a reference point for understanding different forms of power relations.

Historical amnesia

'I am going to wait for you down the mountain' erases previous experiences of the mountain climbing of immigrant women where the activism of feminist political feminist practices of migrant women are at once disregarded and considered inadequate. The point is that this manoeuvre of "historical amnesia that keeps black women working to invent the wheel every time we have to go to the store for bread" (Lorde, 1980: 117) is "neither accidental nor benign" (Collins, 2000:3). Historical amnesia is an issue about the place and production of the subject and subjectivity (Nayak, 2014). Thus, according to this last author, it is possible to re-read the autochthonous woman's words to the migrant woman in the meeting 'I am going to wait for you down the mountain' in terms of the recognition (or not) of the existence (or not) of Black women, their experiences and what they produce" (2014: 37).

Under the benevolent and solidarity attitude of "waiting"

'Well, I'm going to wait for you down the mountain' could be interpreted as an act of solidarity and benevolence on the part of autochthonous feminists towards migrant women. However, under the apparent benevolent act of 'going to wait for you' the function of 'waiting' produces a colonizing relationship of autochthonous feminists over migrant women which is hidden in several mutually constitutive ways:

Firstly, to wait, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) means "to remain in a place and not do anything until something expected happens". This paper argues that, the apparent, non-action of waiting, 'to remain', 'not doing anything' actually constitutes an action. In other words, 'going to wait for you' is both a position and an action, contingent on the idea that there is no 'non' position (Nayak, 2014). According to this analysis, it is possible to re-read the extract of the meeting in terms of autochthonous feminist's approaches to alliances with migrant women as being contingent upon the active (rather than the passive) "to remain in a place and not do anything until something expected happens". In this case, the "something expected to happen" could be the migrant woman's action of climbing down the mountain until she reaches the destination of autochthonous feminists. Furthermore, the idea that there is 'something expected to happen' forecloses the possibilities of different outcomes; it forecloses the potential of surprise or of the unexpected, including, the possibility of nothing happening. Derrida and Stiegler summarize the dialectic in the following way:

'The *arrivant* must be absolutely other, the other I expect not to be expecting, that I'm not waiting for, whose expectation is made of a non-expectation, an expectation without what in philosophy is called a horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates and amortizes in advance. If I am sure that there is going to be an event, this will not be an event' (Derrida and Stiegler, 2002:13; italics in original). Here, the '*arrivant*' could be migrant women constituted of a certain autochthonous feminist's knowledge that 'anticipates and amortizes in advance' producing the 'expectation' or non-event of "Well, I'm going to wait for you down the mountain."

Secondly, thinking the verb "waiting" in relation to the possibilities and impossibilities of creating feminist alliances across difference, it appears that the idea of movement applies primarily to migrant women; they are the only ones that have to walk up and down the mountain, (active

verbs of motion) while autochthonous women remain waiting, without any sign of movement (non-active verbs). This dynamic is replicated more generally in notions, policies and practices of the politics of integration where immigrants do the 'integrating' in order to fit with the host culture. More specifically, the questions that arise, in regards to autochthonous and migrant women feminist alliances across differences, are: Where is the solidarity in the action of waiting for migrant women? Where is the reciprocity? How is reciprocity possible with in unequal differences?

Finally, to "wait" involves not only not moving physically, but also not moving psychologically; it is an issue of proximity. Sarah Ahmed warns, "This universalist rhetoric of some western feminism involves a refusal to become intimate; it judges from afar by reading 'the other' as a sign of the universal", not opening the possibilities of different readings (2009:41). Re-reading 'the rhetoric' of "Well, I'm going to wait for you down the mountain" in conjunction with Ahmed's words in the quote above, it is possible to read 'I'm going to wait' as a 'refusal to become intimate'. There is no attempt to get close enough to 'the possibilities of different readings' of how to navigate the mountain of feminism. This refusal to get close is very clear, in the case of the controversial topic of feminism and veil. As Lama Abu Odeh states (1993:35) "The refusal to enter into a relationship with 'the veiled woman' is a refusal to recognize the multiplicity of the veiled woman's subjectivity. The other becomes fixed as an object and sign precisely by a refusal to become-more-intimate".

Second position: 'Who can assure you that we will go down at the same point where you are, or that there are other possible roads, other paths by which to go? Why do we have to arrive to the same place where you arrived?'

This second voice disrupts the apparently benevolent proposal of local feminist to wait migrant women in the bottom of the mountain.

"Why do we have to arrive to the same place where you arrived?" is a shaking out to the autochthonous feminists who do not realize its implication in the subordination of other women fixing the way in which the migrant women should climb the mountain. Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack's (1998) call it the "race to innocence", in order to explain the process through which a woman comes to believe her own claim of subordination is the most urgent, and that she is not implicated in the subordination of other women. For the authors, "when we view ourselves as innocent, we cannot confront the hierarchies that operate among us" (1998:335), not being consciousness of our own racism and oppression to other women.

The figure of the migrant killjoy

This interrupting voice can be read as the figure of feminist killjoy coined by Sara Ahmed (2010). She explained this figure in the following terms:

"Let's take this figure of the feminist killjoy seriously. Does the feminist kill other people's joy by pointing out moments of sexism? Or does she expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy? Does bad feeling enter the room when somebody expresses anger about things, or could anger be the moment when the bad feelings that circulate through objects get brought to the surface in a certain way?" (2010: 582, emphasis is ours).

According to this definition, it is possible to read the migrant women answer ‘Who can assure you that we will go down at the same point where you are’, as a killjoy within feminism?

Undoubtedly, the migrant women response is an input of tension, angry and bad feeling in the good and atmosphere of the first meeting where it is assumed that all women have to be happy and well disposal to create commonalities and alliances.

For Sarah Ahmed (2010) within feminism, some bodies more than others can be killjoy. For example, Audre Lorde (1984) and bell hooks (2000) have pointed to the figure of the angry black activist woman. They may kill feminist joy by pointing out forms of racism within feminist politics. bell hooks offers the following example of a group of white feminist activists who do not know one another and who may be present at a meeting to discuss feminist theory. They may feel bonded on the basis of shared womanhood, but the atmosphere will noticeably change when a woman of color enters the room: “the white women will become tense, no longer relaxed, no longer celebratory” (2000:56).

‘Who can assure you that we will go down at the same point where you are? –is an answer that like hook’s description, interrupts the good feeling atmosphere of the migrant and autochthonous meeting “that will become tense and no longer relaxed” (hooks, 2000:56).

Furthermore, as Sara Ahmed (2010) points out, this answer not only creates tension within the meeting, but locates the tension: “In being felt by some bodies, it is attributed as caused by another body, who thus comes to be felt as apart from the group, as getting in the way of its organic enjoyment of solidarity” (p.583). The migrant woman’s body is the source of tension, provoking the guilt of western feminists. Audre Lorde argues:

“When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are ‘creating a mood of helplessness,’ ‘preventing white women from getting past guilt,’ or ‘standing in the way of trusting communication and action’” (1984: 131).

Apparently, migrant women must contain their anger in order not to create feelings of guilt for the autochthonous women about the colonial past. Here, the migrant women’s voice becomes a blockage point because she disturbs the atmosphere of willing to create alliances. As Sara Ahmed (2010:582) has pointed out, “she disturbs the promise of happiness, which is the social pressure to maintain signs of getting along”.

Ain’t I a feminist?

“Who can assure you that we will go down at the same point where you are, or that there are other possible roads, other paths by which to go? Why do we have to arrive to the same place where you arrived?” encloses three questions in one challenging all ahistorical or essentialist notions of “woman”. It is a deep cry of pain of the multiple and intersections oppressions that millions of women historically located in the margins have suffered.

“Why do we have to arrive to the same place where you arrived?” seems an echo that follow and continue the known cry of the enslaved woman Sojourner Truth: “Ain’t a woman?”.

Moreover, if then the scream that was stamped in history was “Ain’t a woman”, in this case the migrated woman cry appears demanding the autochthonous woman: “Ain’t a feminist? Both

screams draw attention to the simultaneous importance of subjectivity, underlying subjective pain and violence that usually is uncomfortable and refused to hear about or acknowledge.

Sojourner Truth's 1851st speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, very well demonstrates the historical power of a political subject who challenges imperatives of subordination and thereby creates new visions.

In the same way, "Who can assure you (...) that there are other possible roads, other paths by which to go" it is challenging the imperative feminism and at the same time creating new possibilities of live and being feminist. In terms of Foucault the power not only disciplines subjects, it also creates new subjects and its consequences are much bigger than the gains or losses of an individual life who articulates a particular political subject position (Brah and Phoenix, 2004).

In both shouts, the question mark at the end (?) highlights how the political identity is never taken as given but is opened and relational, constructed in relation to the others, demonstrating that "identities" aren't objects but processes constituted in and through power relations.

Sojourner Truth was illiterate and there is no formal record of the speech. It is again the historical amnesia that Audre Lorde (1980) revealed. That leads to think how many other cries and speeches like *Ain't a woman* have been denied and not listened along the feminist history. In this sense, Bell hooks states: "Feminism has its party line and women who feel a need for a different strategy, a different foundation, often find themselves ostracized and silenced. (1984:9).

As well as "Ain't a woman", "Why do we have to arrive to the same place where you arrived?" utterance refuses all final closures. It is a cry against totalitarianism and uniformity challenging any essentialist thinking. Using Wa Thiongo's (1996) critical notion this voice performs the "decolonized mind" putting into question closed identities, opening new possibilities and disarticulating, rupturing and des-centering the central self-importance of certain feminisms.

Remarking the process of climbing the feminist mountain

While the local woman marks the beginning of partnerships at the end of the mountain, (after the migrant women climb and down the mountain), the voice of the migrant woman changes the focus, emphasizing that it is in the process of climbing the mountain where the possibility of differences to be articulated can occur. The process of climbing the mountain appears as the core enabler of initial identities to be transformed by the "events" that can occur during it:

In the process of climbing the mountain a lot of things can happen: I can get lost, I can find myself back, I can see a new or easier way, I may stop, step back... and end in a different place that I thought.

This relevance of the process in the articulation of cultural differences is emphasized as well by Homi Bhabha (1994:2): "What is theoretically innovative and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or process that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestations in the act of defining the idea of society itself".

Here the author challenges the very existence of "originary and initial" subjectivity as part of dialectic difference. In the same way, the migrant women voice is reclaiming the process of climbing the mountain as a powerful "in between space" (Bhabha, 1994:2) where

new transformations and signs of identity can appear “I can get lost, I can see a new or easier way, I may step back” and where innovative sites of collaboration and contestations can initiate, for example “ending in a different place that I thought”.

This last “ending in a different place that I thought” is contesting the very existence of an originary and initial subjectivity, putting the energy into the events that occur during the process that can dismantle the expected result.

In agreement with this, it is remarkable how the process of climbing the mountain described by the migrant woman is not straight and linear, always advancing forward. She includes stops, going back and even getting lost. Here the migrant women’s voice criticizes and questions a linear pathway toward feminist empowerment—as if it is an easy and straightforward path. On the contrary, the voice recognizes the difficulties and not always easy trip of feminist empowerment. These obstacles do not have to be regarded as negative, quite the opposite. Patti Lather (2007), for example, is committed to the sense of loss as a potential and creative state. She defends “getting lost” as “an opening up of space that allows for new ways of knowing to emerge. (...)When a person exists in a space that is unfamiliar, where they are vulnerable and exposed—a place of not knowing, of surrender, of reduced power—perhaps this is when naturally, the opportunity to see or understand something different surfaces” (2007:13).

Third position: It’s good that you wait for us. We’ll meet you there!

The described situation also shows how the colonial domination shapes and conditions the migrant women. While in the fragment there is a voice that disrupts and disagrees with the proposal, the speaker states that she would have responded affirmatively to the offer of “meeting the autochthonous woman at the bottom of the mountain”; that is to say, accepting that she must embody similar feminist values than the autochthonous woman.

She justifies this acceptance in terms of resignation; she is “more easygoing” and “accommodates herself to the situation”. As we will explain above, this accommodation to “the somatic norm” (Puwar, 2004) is presented not as a positive move but in terms of submission and compliance.

I would rather exist in subordination than not exist

This optimistic reaction of the migrant women speaker, nearly giving thanks to the local women for waiting them down the mountain, was pointed out by Audre Lorde (1981) when she questions the terms of oppression that constitutes the “ticket” to move from the position of being “out of place” (Puwar, 2004) to inside the fold:

“What woman here is so enamoured of her own oppression that she cannot see her heelprint upon another woman’s face? What woman’s terms of oppression have become precious and necessary to her as ticket into the fold of righteous, away from the cold winds of self-scrutiny?” (Lorde: 1981: 132).

Accepting the proposal of the local women without any resistance or opposition becomes “the ticket into the fold” (Lorde: 1981: 132) of feminism, in order to be recognized by the local women. But how we can understand this wish to be recognized and enter into the fold of feminism? Which psychosocial mechanisms are operating in them?

Judith Butler’s (1997) analysis of *The Psychic Life of Power* explores these mechanisms explaining the work of power, producing the attachment to subjection:

“Called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because I have a certain inevitable attachment to my existence, because certain narcissism takes hold of any term that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially” (Butler, 1997:104)

So when the speaker replies: ‘It’s good that you wait for us, we’ll meet you there!’ she is embracing and reinforcing her subordination or in Lorde’s terms being “so enamoured by her own oppression” but at the same time that subordination configures and constitutes her identity. As Butler sustains the mechanism that is playing under the line is: “I would rather exist in subordination than not exist” (p.7).

In other words, within subjection the price of existence is subordination. With “It’s good that you wait for us, we’ll meet you there”, the subject pursues and accepts her subordination “as the promise of existence” (Butler, 1997: 20).

The epidermalization and the universalism violence: The colonization of psychic space

As Kelly Oliver (2001:34) has pointed out “The racist social structures create racist psychic structures. Racism shapes and conditions our identity and makes us all racist subjects”. Moreover, many authors have displayed (Fanon, 2008; Lorde 1984) the mechanisms of the racist social structures operate differently for oppressed and oppressor subjects. But how the social get into the psyche and operate in relation to the specificity of racism? Frantz Fanon (2008) draws the particular entrapments used in colonization of psych space. He coined the term “epidermalization” to describe the process of internalized and an inferiority complex based on socioeconomic iniquities, and the desire to “whiten the race” (p. 47). He utilizes pathological metaphors to describe the colonial condition. Fanon deploys ‘epidermalization’ to characterize the phenomena both perceptual and psychical of anti-black racism and the primacy of vision that in a sense metastases as a cancer on the body of blacks who must live with that skin never being able to escape it.

This phenomenon of epidermalization explains the attitude of accommodation of the speaker voice, trying to adjust to the “universal norm” that represents the local feminist. If we repair into the etymology, the source of accommodate is Latin *accommodare* “make fitting, fit one thing to another”. In this case the migrant women has to “make fitting” to the local path while the local feminist only wait for her.

This move to accommodate the beaten path, the only way to climb the feminist mountain not only means to refuse or neglect other alternatives roads of being feminist but also narrows the feminism political potential and even more dangerous, rules out the creativity and agency of women to create new feminist paths or rework trodden paths. In this sense, Chandra Tapalde Mohanty explains very properly the effect and consequences of this “universalism violence” over Third World women:

“The application of the notion of women as a homogenous category to women in the Third World colonizes and appropriates the pluralities of the simultaneous location of different groups of women in social class and ethnic frameworks; in doing so it ultimately robs them of their historical and political agency” (Mohanty, 1984:39).

Learning not to see racism and the inheritance of happiness

Because, as pointed out above, racism shapes and conditions our identity, racism is a pain that is hard to bear for those who suffered it. For Sara Ahmed (2010) people learn not to see racism as a way of bearing the pain. She argues:

“To see racism, you have to unsee the world [in which] you learned to see it, the world that covers unhappiness by covering over its cause. You have to be willing to venture into secret places of pain” (p.590). Some forms of taking cover from that pain is to embrace the happiness. Moreover, Ahmed (2010) states how the happiness can work not only to conceal the causes of hurt but even to make people responsible of their own hurt. Concurrently, Audre Lorde suggests in her *Cancer Journals*, how “looking on the bright side of things is a euphemism used for obscuring certain realities of life, the open consideration of which might prove threatening to the status quo” (1980, 76).

On one hand, the speaker’s optimistic attitude focusing on the “bright side of things” that local feminists are going to wait for them at the bottom of the mountain operates as a protection for the racism that is underlining behind that apparent benevolent proposal. On the other hand, Marilyn Frye (1983) highlights how oppression involves not contradicting or complaining but showing signs of being happy with the situation in which you find yourself. She explains in the following way: “it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signify our docility and our acquiescence in our situation” (p. 2).

“Because I am more easy going and I accommodate myself to the situation” can be read as an indication of the docility requirements that are part of oppression. It is common that migrant women and “third world women”, in Mohanty’s term (2003) are socially and discursively presented as easy, docile and passive (Juliano, 2000, Gregorio Gil, 2010). “We will meet down!”—with an exclamation mark—is a clear sign of being happy with the proposal without any objection to it.

In summary, in this brief excerpt we have two different positions facing the feminist proposal: the location that shows happiness and doesn’t show opposition or resistance and the position of the migrant killjoy that shows angry, hostility and unhappiness and appears as a deviate from the paths of correct and straight feminism.

Conclusions: Creating alliances, creating politics of intimacy

This paper has addressed the possibilities and difficulties for weaving alliances between autochthonous feminists and migrant women in Basque Country.

Specifically it has analyzed a metaphor that arose in one of the first group meetings between autochthonous and migrant women regarding the ‘mountain’ as a metaphor of the feminist empowerment. The mountain image, instead of offering an anecdotal exemplification, constitutes an active metaphor expressing some of the complications when dealing with differences associated with a national origin and different experiences of being feminist.

Based on the three different positions analyzed above, it is possible to gather up some relevant proposals in order to create feminist alliances that take account the multiple positions and diversity experiences of being and life feminism.

In first place, future feminist alliances between immigrant and autochthonous women should be aware of the implications of the opposition that reproduces in everyday interaction colonial geopolitical boundaries. As postcolonial feminism suggest, it’s necessary to recognize different differences between women -and oppressions that are attached to these differences- in

order to weave multiple feminist projects in a diverse and multifarious fabric. At the same time, autochthonous women have to be aware of their built in privilege and how they define woman and feminist experience in terms of their own experience. Patriarchy does not manifest in the same way in different cultural and social contexts, and the oppressions and experiences of women in these contexts can take many different forms. The recognition of these experiences can be mutually beneficial in the identification of the relationships of power that are taking place in a particular context. In this sense, western feminism is just a form of feminism, and it can be improved by including the practices that women around the world have developed in order to survive and fight patriarchy.

As Audre Lorde warns, “ignoring the differences of race between women and the implications of those differences presents the most serious threat to the mobilization of women’s joint power. (1980: 117).

In fact, ‘race’ and gender do not add up to an easy, happy politics of alliance; they are often contradictory entities (Carby 1982; Chaudhuri, 1992). This can be seen from the numerous occasions like in the analyzed meeting where western women act which purport to be in the interests of women of ‘other’ cultures, but finally they end reproducing the patriarchal and colonialist practices of power that feminism seek to contest.

A second qualification is to keep in mind and don’t forget how “beyond sisterhood is still racism” (Lorde, 1979:70). To combat the racism the passion of anger is crucial to react against the deep investment that exist in forms of racism as well as sexism. In that sense, against the politics of happiness and requirement for docility of oppression, anger translated into action is a liberating and strengthening act against racism and any other oppression. As the migrant killjoy voice that doesn’t silence, in order to create alliances, speaking and disagreements are necessary, even if it involves risks and costs or if we fail to get through other people’s defenses. Anger is creative, opening possibilities against universality and homogeneity.

Finally, the possibility of alliances are possible only by the recognition of the unequal dialogue between different women. In that sense, for Audre Lorde (1980:115) is clear “It is not differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences”. This requires build up a different feminist ethical relation based on a more mutual engagement that recognizes not only the inequalities but also the privileges. In fact, according to Elizabeth Spelman (1988) talking about the differences means talking about the privileges.

Therefore, “it is a politics of intimacies, a politics of getting closer to others -not to wait until the migrant women go up and down the mountain but going to the encounter of the other- that will enable the distance and differences between us and move the political terrain in which it is possible to speak and hear” (Ahmed, 2010:29). To that end, it is urged to unlearn the “violence of universalism” and hence to learn to speak to, and hear, different women in order through these engagements we could be displaced, moved or touched by others. As Nirmal Puwar (2004:77) states, the questions of our times, and I will add the core of the feminism nowadays, is “how the “other” can exist without making the other the same”.

In short, the construction of feminist alliances between autochthonous women and migrant women should take into account the different positions of power and privilege that affect women according to different trajectories while, at the same time, building a politics of intimacies and encounters that encourage ethical dialogue. Such dialog must assume “...that the dialogue itself does not lead to ‘grasping’ the truth of another, but allows a movement in-between” (Ahmed, 2010:33). Indeed, creating common articulations across differences need to be understood in relation to those temporary, evanescent and affective “in-between moments” of touch and being

touched. As this paper pointed out in the beginning: “An otherness barely touched upon and that already moves away” (Julia Kristeva, 1991:3).

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