

Chapter 13

What Does “¡Quédate en casa!” (‘Stay at Home!’) Mean for a Poor Woman?

Analysis of an Online Debate Conducted by an Ecuadorian Feminist Group

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is the discursive analysis of the online debate carried out in April 2020, in the middle of the confinement period of the COVID-19 pandemic, by a feminist group from Ecuador. The topic was to discuss the impact on poor women in the country of the consequences of the government order to be confined to the home: “¡Quédate en casa!” (‘Stay at home!’). From a constructivist perspective, the most relevant discursive-argumentative resources of the debate are analyzed, with the aim of revealing the participants’ “framework of interpretation” or “narrative construction” based on their reflection of what was supposed to be an order issued by all governments, at the behest of the WHO (World Health Organization), but whose concrete materialization could not be realized in a similar way in all social contexts.

[Ethnography] has the potential and the capacity of challenging established views, not only of language but of symbolic capital in societies in general (Blommaert, & Jie, 2010, 10).

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INTRODUCTION

One of the general objectives of the different feminist groups has been to create the appropriate discourses that could help them introduce their demands in favor of women's rights into the political and mass media agendas. This is also the work that for the last twenty-five years has been carried out by the *Movimiento de Mujeres de El Oro* in Ecuador (*MMO* from now on). Although they are based in the city of Machala, in the South West of the country, they are in close contact with other feminist groups in Ecuador as well as with female indigenous leaders. They have celebrated frequent meetings, as indicated in my ethnographic research carried out in 2008 and 2009 (Morales-López, 2012a, 2014). However, as in the rest of the world, the pandemic has opened up new possibilities of communication for social groups and there have been numerous digital meetings to debate on the exceptional circumstances we are living through, a new problem to add to those already existing in our respective social contexts. In particular, the *MMO*'s main goal has always been delving into the reasons behind the poverty of so many Ecuadorian women, a fact made worse by the pandemic because most of them have informal or under-the-table jobs and are the main supporters of their children (that is, they belong to monoparental homes).

In 2008, the *MMO* had a prominent role offering feminist proposals for the writing of the latest country's Constitution, promoted by the then president Rafael Correa. That same year, this feminist movement, together with other social movements, supported his reelection. Nevertheless, the changes he promised never took place and little by little many withdrew their support. In several publications, Morales-López (2012a, 2014) analyzes the discursive dispute between the *MMO* and the Correa Government on the topic of the legal recognition of the model of solidary economies and finances geared exclusively towards popular women.

The next two terms in office of Rafael Correa provided political stability to the country (Morales-López, 2012b). However, the feminist movement was unhappy in general because their main requests were not accepted, particularly regarding reproductive rights and concrete solutions to the structural poverty of most working women. His successor, Lenin Moreno, has not been able to deal with those requests either; in addition, his political objectives have been leaning progressively towards the liberal ideology, according to most women in the *MMO*. In the first turn of the February 2021 elections, Lenin did not even present himself for re-election. The second turn in April 11 has confirmed his successor Guillermo Lasso in power.

The main topic will be the beginning of the pandemic. It takes place during Lenin Moreno's tenure. The critical opinions in the debate we analyze refer to his Executive's management during the first months of the pandemic. We have selected the interventions of two activist women because we consider them the most representative for our topic. We will do a discourse analysis of the main resources utilized in order to analyze the ideological framework of the narrative they construe in their interventions.

BACKGROUND

In previous articles, Morales-López (2017a, 2017b, in press) explains the constructivist theoretical and methodological approach utilized in the critical analysis of ideological discourses, something that also applies to this article (see also Pujante, 2017). This constructivist position defends as one of its main ideas that meaning is constructed through the interaction process with and is closely linked to context (van Dijk, 2005, 2008). This meaning is then completely dependent on these conditions. From this per-

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