

Feminisms and Migration into Italy: the Intersectionality of Gender and Race

Stefania Donzelli

Abstract

This study explores feminist uses of 'gender' as a social category in relation to the phenomenon of cross-border migration and its regulation. Specifically, it examines feminist narratives produced from lived experiences of struggle that contest and contrast with the current governing of migration into Italy during the period 2007-2013. It focuses on 'gender' as (1) a structure of power affecting both migrants and citizens in destination societies and (2) a source of identification shaping the construction of feminist subjectivities. It argues that this category may be both distinguished from and interlocked with 'race' in ways that normalise or deconstruct the production of 'irregular' migration as an object of governmental power.

Epistemologically, this work draws on feminist theories of knowledge in the social sciences to illuminate the making of 'gender' from the situated perspectives of predominantly white feminists. A number of tools from Critical Discourse Analysis are employed to analyse the feminist narratives collected during one year of fieldwork. The combination of feminist epistemological theories and Critical Discourse Analysis enables the study to bring to the fore the central role of resilient processes of racialization of the Italian national community in the feminist signification of 'gender'. In particular, it shows an underlying tension that drives and shapes contemporary feminist politics, one which combines the aspiration to fight racism with the sub-conscious reproduction of dominant racialising processes.

Theoretically, this study promotes the collaboration among, and dialogue between, three bodies of literature: the Autonomy of Migration approach, which helps us to unravel tensions between the phenomenon of migration and governmental processes; Intersectionality, which serves to bring into view the role of 'gender' and 'race' in these social phenomena; and Transnational Feminism, which assists us in revealing methodological nationalism in applications of intersectionality. Fine-tuning these theoretical approaches, this work aspires to open up new possibilities to critically rethink the meanings of 'gender' so as to participate in the moulding of an intersectional feminist approach to migration.