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Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003.

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Abstract: In *Feminism without Borders*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1955–), a postcolonial as well as transnational feminist and a distinguished professor of women and gender studies, advocates that intersectionality, transnationalism, and decolonization of established pedagogies and practices are the key factors for building cross-cultural feminist solidarity. She thinks that borders have to be transcended and all social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and class-based parameters are needed to consider understanding the oppression as well as the privileges of women around the world. Mohanty says without borders does not mean borderless, rather, it incorporates all the borders, irrespective of race and nation, to get the plural and/or multiple perspectives of feminist movements. She believes it is not the universal notion of sisterhood but the notion of feminist solidarity, which is significant for the emancipation of women from every walk of life.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Transnationalism, Decolonization, Feminist Solidarity, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, Women Studies, Gender Studies

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, a postcolonial as well as transnational feminist and a distinguished professor of women and gender studies, advocates that intersectionality, transnationalism, and decolonization of established pedagogies and practices are the key factors for building cross-cultural feminist solidarity in *Feminism without Borders*. She puts forward that borders have to be transcended and all social, cultural, racial, ethnic, and class-based parameters are to be reconsidered in order to understand the oppression as well as the privileges of women around the world. Mohanty reveals that "feminism without borders" does not equal to "'border-less' feminism", but it rather refers to a feminism that incorporates all borders, irrespective of race and nation, to include the plural and/or multiple perspectives of various feminist movements (2). Mohanty believes it is not the universal notion of sisterhood but the notion of feminist solidarity which is significant for the emancipation of women from every walk of life. Alluding to Robin Morgan, Mohanty writes that the notion of universal feminism addresses "a commonality of gender experience across race and national lines" (193), so she posits sisterhood as a "productive pedagogical strategy for feminist cross-cultural work", which "provides a way to theorize a complex relational understanding of experience, location, and history" (238). Rather than commonality, solidarity focuses on

"differences and unequal power relations" (239). This feminist solidarity is not possible to achieve if we cannot decolonize "masculinist Marxism", "capitalist patriarchy" and "imperial feminism" (4). Alluding to Jodi Dean, the author turns to the notion of "reflective solidarity" which is useful in creating coalition among women across borders (7). This reflective solidarity demands deconstruction and decolonization of feminism, especially the notion of white feminism, which has the potential to pave the way for the "transformation of the self, reconceptualizations of identity, and political mobilization" (8).

Feminism without Borders is divided in three sections comprising nine chapters in total where she expresses her scholarship with explanation and examples, showing reasons why it is important to think in terms of intersectionality and transnationalism to build a reflective feminist solidarity.

Mohanty's first attempt in *Feminism without Borders* is to highlight the impact of hegemonic Western feminism or "Western feminist discourses on women in the Third World" (11). Western feminists want to see the experiences of the women of developing countries through the lens of a "universal patriarchal framework" (20), which is monolithic. It is "the global hegemony of Western [feminist] scholarship" that produces, publishes, distributes, and consumes the information and ideas about the women of the global south (21). Thus, the Western feminist discourses construct the "Third World women as a homogenous, undifferentiated group leading truncated lives, victimized by the combined weight of their traditions, cultures, and beliefs, and 'our' (Eurocentric) history" (192). This construction is a perennial one which is executed by portraying the women of the developing countries as "victims of male violence", "victims of the colonial process", "victims of the Arab familial system", and religious ideologies (23), mostly based on a generalized notion of their subordination, limiting "the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities" (31). This is a problematic representation of women, especially the women of the "Third World". She criticizes Fran Hosken who equates purdah with domestic violence and rape denying the cultural and historical specificity and contradictions when Hosken states, "[r]ape, forced prostitution, polygamy, genital mutilation, pornography, the beating of girls and women, purdah (segregation of women) are all violations of basic human rights" (in Mohanty 33).

Hegemonic Western feminism aligns the concepts of "reproduction, the sexual division of labor, the family, marriage, household, patriarchy and so on […] without their specification in local cultural and historical contexts" (34). The Western feminists, "by ignoring the complex and mobile relationships between" the women of the global south and "their historical materiality", ignore racism, colonialism, and imperialism interwoven within the oppressive mechanism (37). Western feminist thinkers want to see the images of the Oriental woman as the "veiled woman" or the "chaste virgin", however, their own images are seen as liberated, secular, and self-regulated (42). As such, the Western feminist writers draw a binary line between the First World woman and the Third World woman. Therefore, Mohanty thinks that the notion of universal sisterhood is "vague" in this context (3). Mohanty believes that hegemonic Western feminist discourses need deconstruction and decolonization either to represent the sufferings and experiences of the women of the global south or to listen to the self-representation of the Third World women (169).

Mohanty suggests that Third World women are the victims of the politics of feminism, as they mostly remain in the periphery of the "institutional power structures" (43). She alludes to Audre Lord and pays tribute to her for the representation of how U.S. based feminism clearly demarcates between them and the Third World feminism. Though the term "Third World" has geographical undertones, confining it within the geographical location will only be inappropriate as Mohanty understands the "Third World" as a term that "designate[s] geographical location and sociohistorical conjunctures […] [which] incorporates so-called minority peoples or people of color in the United States" (44). When Mohanty refers to the Third World feminism and the Third World women, she does not confine her concepts within geographical boundaries but she rather contextualizes them in relation to sex, gender, body, race, nation, color, and ethnicity. She argues that we need to recognize "how women in different sociocultural and historical locations formulate their relation to feminism" (49). As the concept of the Third World cannot be delimited to the geographical boundaries, the concept of feminism cannot be fixed within gendered terms only. One becomes woman in relation to her sex, gender, class, caste, race, ethnicity, and nationality. Referring to Simon de Beauvoir, Mohanty writes that "no one 'becomes a woman' […] purely because she is female" (55). She emphasizes the "urgent need for us to appreciate and understand the complex relationality that shapes our social and political lives" (55). Without understanding "the complex relationality or

intersectionality", we cannot understand the power dynamics or the relations of ruling to the meaning of "multiple intersections of structures of power" (56).

The author herself has the multiplicities of identity; she is a woman, an Indian by birth, a woman of color, an immigrant now a citizen, a professor, and a postcolonial and antiracist theorist—all these identities are important for her, so her identity cannot be confined to be a female only. The advocacy of intersectionality within the very self is articulated when she refers to the "plurality of self" by citing Norma Alarcon and later referring to Gloria Anzaldua's "mestiza consciousness" (80). The politics of Western feminism and/or White feminism does not include the plural or collective consciousness paying attention to sex, gender, race, class, caste, and ethnicity, because Western feminism is the purview of liberal humanism, enabling the hegemonic power structures in its essence. Women can only show their autonomy, resistance, and agency collectively if they organize a solidarity and protest against all forms of domination. She argues that to understand "Third World women's engagement with feminism", we need to consider "anthropology as an example of a discourse of dominance and self-reflexivity and […] the autobiography […] as a discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency" (84). Thus, the subjective identity and subjective agency are interlinked to the collective consciousness and multiple determinants.

One of the reasons why Mohanty questions the very notion of universal sisterhood is because it denotes "the universality of gender oppression" and struggles which she finds to be "problematic" (107). The universality of gender oppression is not as same as "the universal rights of women" (107). The universal rights of women focus on the particularities of women's experiences whereas universality of gender oppression suggests women are homogenously oppressed across the borders. To substantiate her argument, Mohanty refers to Robin Morgan's "Planetary Feminism: The Politics of the 21st Century" and Bernice Johnson Reagon's "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century", revealing that both essays see women from a vintage point which is opposition to "androcentrism" only (107). Morgan's essay assumes that women are a "cross-culturally singular, homogenous group with the same interests, perspectives, and goals and similar experiences" (110). Morgan's notion of universal sisterhood erases "the history and effects of contemporary imperialism", so this model has "dangerous implications for women who do not and cannot speak from a location of white, Western, middle-class privilege" (111). As Morgan sees women "as a coherent group in all contexts", she only evaluates sisterhood on the basis of women's shared opposition to androcentrism, validating women's shared status that grounds them as victims (113). However, Mohanty thinks that "being female" and "becoming feminist" are not the same (49). However, the "feminist osmosis thesis" articulated by Morgan claims them as the same, highlighting that all women are oppressed and so all of them have to react in the same manner (109). Hence, the feminists need to consider women's experiences in the context of local within and outside the borders rather than global, because this local can be a shifting perspective, essential for the emancipation of women of once colonized countries, women of color, and women of the less privileged classes. The "current *intersection* of anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and gay and lesbian struggles" have to be understood, and it is necessary to explore diverse grounds across regions, politics, and issues (120) (emphasis original).

One of the challenges to build collective solidarity and resistance among women across borders and nationalities is the "corporate U.S. academy" (169). Mohanty states that the U.S. academy is a corporatized institution which follows the hegemonic colonial and racial legacy. Therefore, the U.S. academy, otherwise defined by various authors with terms such as "the Knowledge Factory", "the corporate university", "digital diploma mills", "academic capitalism", and "the academic globalization of North American universities" have to be decolonized and deconstructed, for these universities circulate and practice the recolonization process (170). The decolonization of established pedagogies in the U.S. academy is paramount because the U.S. academy "often situate[s] Third World peoples as populations whose histories and experiences are deviant, marginal, or inessential to the acquisition of knowledge" (200). The binary still existing between the centre and the margin in the academy has to be destroyed (201). The classroom can play a vital role in terms of eradicating the binary between the centre and the margin (201-2). Mohanty puts forward that "feminist pedagogies" have always recognized the importance of experience in the classroom (243). So, it can be a place for "the politicization of individuals along race, gender, class, and sexual parameters" which empowers the marginal experiences through the classroom (202). Creating "counterhegemonic pedagogies" can replace the existing "pedagogy of normative pluralism" which defines an individual as the representative of a whole cultural group (204). Mohanty argues that the "white heterosexual masculinity in academy" (207), along with "academic capitalism" (178), and "corporatization of academy" (175) have to be reformed and decolonized to produce knowledge that advocates multiculturalism in order to create

solidarity among women across nationalities. In Mohanty's words, "the purpose of liberal education" has to be thought in relation to "antiracist" and "anti-capitalist feminist" perspectives (216).

Mohanty concludes her book by revisiting her earlier essay "Under Western Eyes" by paying particular attention to cross-cultural feminist solidarity. Though her earlier essay focuses on narrow self-interest of Western feminism and the binary between the North and the South and between the Western and Non-Western, her present work departs from the previous one. She now evaluates "feminism without and beyond borders" (234). She visits the formulations of the "*Feminist-as-Tourist Model*" (239), and "*Feminist-as-Explorer Model*" (240), and concludes that "*The Feminist Solidarity or Comparative Feminist Studies Model*" is the most essential and productive pedagogical strategy for feminist cross cultural work (242) (emphasis original). As the lives of women are connected and interdependent, a pedagogical course can be offered to anchor feminist solidarity by focusing on "the interconnectedness of the histories, experiences, and struggles of U.S. women of color, white women, and women from the Third World/South" (242). Mohanty finally reveals that "[a] transnational feminist practice" is only possible if feminist solidarity is built "across the divisions of place, identity, class, work, belief, and so on" and if the feminists become anti-capitalists, and theorists become feminists (250).

In conclusion, Mohanty's *Feminism without Borders* is a critical masterpiece in which she uplifts the necessity of intersectionality, transnationalism, and the feminist solidarity by decolonizing the recolonizing forces—including that of globalization, environmental racism, capitalism, universal feminism, and universal notion of sisterhood. She speaks from her experience both as a professor, immigrant, U.S. citizen, woman, woman of colour, Indian, and an Indian American. Thus, she redefines the terms "home", and "location" in relation to intersectional feminism. Her challenge against the proposition of "I am, therefore I resist" (77) sheds light on her rejection of the idea that the sole reason of being a woman is being female. To Mohanty, one's experiences as a woman must be considered in relation to her socio-cultural, political, religious, racial, ethnic, national, and class-based borders.

Works Cited

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