

THIRD WORLD FEMINISM: FINDING SOLIDARITY IN THE GLOBAL MARKET

Authors:

Jessica Cortese, Yasmit Djerbal, and Julie Anne Garretson

Faculty Sponsor:

John Landreau,

Department of Women's and Gender Studies

ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

In an era of global economic changes, women are facing new challenges that affect their lives in the social, economic and political spheres. The feminization of poverty has been defined and re-defined by unequal privileges between men and women, rich and poor, North and South. In this paper, we explore globalization in relation to neo-liberalist capitalism using Third World feminist theories, while illustrating ways in which transnational feminism is working toward a feminist solidarity model.

Globalization is a network of relationships between countries that expands their frontiers, while involving the rapid increase of cross-border economic, social, technological, political and cultural exchanges. The social aspects of globalization have enhanced exchanges among cultures, traditions and even people. One can go down a street in Bangladesh and find an Ethiopian restaurant, or a French woman can find work in a Chinese company in the United States. The liberalization of markets has facilitated an unobstructed flow of goods, technologies, politics and even labor between countries and nations. Amnesty International, for example has been able to promulgate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights throughout the world. Moreover, in unprecedented opportunities to spread global values, feminist organizations have been able to share experiences and touch more people than ever before through international coalitions such as the 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing, or technologies such as the internet. The social scope of globalization has redefined the world and its people.

The economic dimensions of globalization, on the other hand, have restructured the global economy to liberalized markets, privatized capital and an unparalleled flexibility of labor. Jaggar defines globalization as the rapidly accelerating integration of many local and national economies into a single global market, often referred to as a "Global Village." These worldwide markets are primarily regulated and dictated by organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (298). One needs to make clear distinction, however, between globalization and neoliberalism, a name given to a version of liberal political theory that currently dominates the discourse of globalization. Neoliberalism is characterized, according to Jaggar, by some main features that include "Free Trade," or the unobstructed flow of traded goods, while eliminating import and export quotas and tariffs. It promotes the transfer of multinational corporations to geographic areas of the world where costs are lower, notably the Global South. One might think, for example, of maquiladoras built in different parts of Latin America, where wages are lower, occupational safety, health requirements and environmental restrictions are fewer, and where international companies can dictate laws, restrictions, and the flow of goods (Jaggar 298). With limits on laws and regulations, or the absence thereof, wages, working conditions, and environmental protections are significantly minimized and overlooked. Workers are thus affected by globalization, though not uniformly. Multinational corporations have been downsizing, outsourcing, and decentralizing production in ways that demand a flexible labor force and result in the growth of informal, temporary, underpaid, and insecure employment (Croucher 161). While women, who constitute the overwhelming majority of workers, have benefited from new employment opportunities by earning independent wages, they often work in horrendous conditions for long hours and low pay with forced overtime and no benefits (Croucher 168).

While globalization and neoliberalism's utopianist philosophies might be consistent with ideals of prosperity, growth and affluence for some in the "Global North" who enjoy economic abundance and political stability, the "Global South" has entered an era of colonization and economic dependence, aggravated by war and poverty. As Jaggar remarks, the gap between rich and poor countries has been widening. Because of the different experiences of women, in terms of age, class, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and religion, it is hard to generalize the benefits and disadvantages of globalization to all women. It is important to recognize the diversity of human experience when it comes to globalization and its influence on different people. Still, the feminization of labor lies at the center of our discussion, as we observe an increased participation of women in the labor market in the last few decades, in both formal and informal markets. As immigrants take over household and child care work, low salaries and the lack of benefits are justified by classifying the jobs as unskilled, easy, and "women's work." This pattern of female migration reflects what could be called a worldwide gender revolution as we have First World women working as professors and doctors, pilots and engineers, spending more and more time at work, while having less and less time for household chores and childcare. We also have Third World women, coming from different countries in Africa, Asia and South America to replace these women's previously unpaid household labor and being exploited as marginalized labor by multinational corporations.

When discussing globalization and its potential benefits or disadvantages for women, it only seems appropriate to discuss Third World feminism philosophy on the subject. U.S. feminists of color have had a firm understanding of how "especially race, but also one's culture, sex, or class, can deny comfortable or easy access to any legitimized gender category so that the interactions between such social classification produce other, unnamed gender forms within the social hierarchy" (Sandoval 44). In the 1970's, U.S. feminists of color often did not identify themselves with U.S. white feminists; they were unable to accept a single hegemonic feminist ideology founded on the experiences of white women as the solution to their oppression, especially as women who lived a feminist lifestyle "more like urban guerillas...who are often neither understood by white middle-class feminists nor leftist activists" (Sandoval 58).

However, just as there was a need to recognize Third World women as different from white, middle-class American women, it was important to acknowledge the different ethnicities and populations of Third World women. Black Feminists, for example, have experienced a dual struggle, for in addition to their battle against sexism they also must wrestle with racism. Their battle was unlike other struggles, for according to the Combahee River Collective, they had to convey that their "liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy...the cruel, often murderous treatment we receive indicates how little value has been placed upon our lives during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemisphere" (The Combahee River Collective 108). While those women demanded equality on their behalf, the Chicanas, mentioned in Anzaldua's "La Conciencia de la Mestiza," insisted on other solutions as a means of resolving their particular cultural obstacles. In Mexican-Indian society, it had become and still is conventional for the inferior, non-machismo man to brutalize women. As these women recognize this violation as well as the need to reclaim their identity, they also ask of whites to:

accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect. We need you to make public restitution: to say that, to compensate for your own sense of defectiveness, you strive for power over us, you erase our history and our experience because it makes you feel guilty--you'd rather forget your brutish acts.... And finally, tell us what you need from us (Anzaldua 260).

Although these are only two examples of female Third World populations, there is an evident distinction between the two cultures in terms of their genesis and development, as well as their current ideology. Nevertheless, with an emerging sense and recognition of this need for a new subjectivity on behalf of

Third World feminists, U.S. feminists of color wanted both to elaborate on hegemonic feminist ideologies and to “de- and recenter given forms of power.” As Chela Sandoval outlines in her book *Methodology of the Oppressed*, a new form of oppositional consciousness emerged for answering the demands of U.S. Third World Feminism, known as differential consciousness.

Sandoval’s differential consciousness derives from philosopher Louis Althusser’s theory of “ideology and ideological state apparatuses.” Althusser describes the significance of human beings as “citizen-subjects,” who are able to find their identity not only through society’s depiction of themselves, but their performance of particular social practices and validation of personal values and desires (Sandoval 42). From this foundation, the well known four-phase “hegemonic feminist typology” materialized between 1968 and 1990. During the first phase, “liberal feminism,” a basic concern with demonstrating a sense of equality with man is asserted. In the second phase, “Marxist feminism,” women reject the idea of accommodating their position to obtain equality, and so they decide to write literature as a means of “dramatizing wronged womanhood” (Sandoval 47). In the third phase, known as “radical feminism,” women attempt to discover and encourage their uniqueness as “female differences originally seen as a source of oppression appear as a source of enrichment” (Sandoval 48). Through this representation of women and the manifestation of their exceptional uniqueness, men and not women becomes “the Other.” Because the three phases did not satisfy the needs or reconcile challenges of U.S. feminists of color, activists and scholars were prompted to design a fourth and final “anarchist” phase, known as “socialist feminism.” This phase emphasized hope for recognizing the differences among women regarding race and class as a means of satisfying the demands of U.S. feminists of color; whether or not this phase was actually obtainable was to be determined in due time.

This hegemonic model quickly became one of the most commonly employed ideologies in social disciplines “to understand oppositional praxis” (Sandoval 52). However, the four-phase hegemonic philosophy received much criticism from U.S. feminists of color, as it was termed the “white women’s movement”; it was evident that the hegemonic ideology had its own political purposes in favor of white feminists’ goals, in addition to limitations on how feminist consciousness could be conceptualized and acted out (Sandoval 52). While most feminists shared a goal of reclaiming some sort of identity, the Black Feminist vision of leveling humanity was not the same as the Chicano’s vision of reclaiming their identity, and neither was consistent with the white feminist movement. Although scholars attempted to overcome this problem by acknowledging differences in female perceptions of “socialist feminism,” there was clearly still a need to redefine the feminist movement’s ideology in order to recognize Third World women’s identities. As a result, Sandoval’s theory and method of oppositional consciousness based on differential consciousness was born.

By definition, oppositional consciousness is a state of consciousness opposing the values and beliefs of the socially dominant order. According to Sandoval, her theory of oppositional consciousness is best viewed as topography rather than a typology, for it is capable of “mapping” the ideological territory where all oppositional activity in the United States has occurred (Sandoval 54). Within this cultural topography there are five points used by subordinated classes who demand subjective ideologies or forms of resistance as an alternative to the hegemonic feminist ideology or the “white feminist movement.” (Sandoval 53). Sandoval explains that these five points or “locations” are “equal rights,” “revolutionary,” “supremacist,” “separatist,” and “differential” forms of consciousness in opposition. Under the “equal rights” location, individuals’ primary concern is the argument for civil rights, based on the fundamental philosophy that “all humans are created equally” (Sandoval 55). Within the “revolutionary” location, practitioners firmly believe that the only way society can completely and entirely value and affirm these differences is fundamentally to restructure the categories by which the dominant is ordered. In that way, society will move beyond all domination or subordination of power. The “supremacist” form dictates that the oppressed not only claim their differences, but contend that their differences have provided these individuals access “to a higher evolutionary level than that attained by those who hold social power” (Sandoval 56). Finally, practitioners of the “separatist” form do not necessarily seek equal rights or initiate revolutionary movements, but rather form an organized political resistance that protects and fosters the unique differences that define the “oppressed” through a complete

and absolute separation from the dominant power. The first four forms found in this topography of oppositional consciousness clearly resemble the four stages found in hegemonic feminist theory.

However, it is through differential consciousness that subordinated classes are able to weave "between and among" the remaining oppositional praxis within this newly conceived topographic space. In other words, in this expanded dimension of the hegemonic ideology, any subordinated class is permitted to shift back and forth between the ideological "locations" ("equal rights," "revolutionary," "supremacist," and "separatist") as a means of revealing the distinctions. Although this differential consciousness depends on a form of agency, Third World feminists themselves as a source of motivation and influence, subordinated classes seeking a new subjectivity are uninhibited by any limitations that may have been in place. When differential consciousness is used in the context of U.S. Third World feminism, the differences that once segregated every race, sex, age, culture, and gender no longer remain opposed to one another, but rather are recognized as "'a fund of necessary polarities...and within that interdependency' each ideological position 'acknowledged and equal, can have the power to seek new ways of being in the world'" (Sandoval 59). Although Sandoval does not relate her theory to globalization nearly as much as Jaggar or Mohanty, it is evident that her concept of differential consciousness allows for the creation of social justice in the competitive and ruthless globalizing markets. Through this justification of equality that comes with differential consciousness, oppressed populations are finally able to achieve a sense of solidarity with Western Culture, and work cohesively towards a more egalitarian future.

In her theory of differential consciousness, Sandoval takes a theoretical approach to issues of gender equality and social justice. Chandra Mohanty, on the other hand, pushes for a more concrete and applicable approach to finding solidarity in a world governed by unbounded globalization, capitalist competition, and feminized labor. Thus, in analyzing Mohanty's article "Under Western Eyes Revisited," it is clear that globalization, a byproduct of capitalism, is not good and in most cases is harmful in the struggles for social, economic, and political advancements of most women. Mohanty reexamines her past work while offering deeper insight into today's global processes. Much of her analysis focuses on Eurocentrism. However, unlike her earlier work on the interactions, distinctions, and interrelations of "Western" and "Third World" feminists, her revised analytical framework seeks to enlighten theorists of the serious and urgent need for transnational feminist solidarity and the unified rejection of corporate capitalist greed. By embracing cross-national feminism and questioning capitalism, Mohanty calls for an "anticapitalist transnational feminist practice."

As Mohanty observes, capitalist economics and globalization are profoundly intertwined, creating a tangled web of corruption and exploitation. Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production is owned chiefly by private individuals or corporations. Through capitalism, the labor of many benefits the powerful and affluent few. Thus, it is not surprising that globalization, under capital, stands further to alienate women, people of color, immigrants, and homosexuals from positions of power. Mohanty takes a Marxist approach to economics when she notes, "I believe capital as it functions now depends on and exacerbates racist, patriarchal, and heterosexist relations of rule" (Mohanty 451).

However, Mohanty transforms Marx's theories and applies them to feminist discourse. Although she does not call for a revolution of the proletariat, she does however seek an antiglobalization movement: "While globalization has always been a part of capitalism and capitalism is not a new phenomenon, at this time I believe the theory, critique and activism around antiglobalization has to be a key focus for feminists" (Mohanty 451). Antiglobalization is a movement working towards global justice and the abolition of multinational corporations that exploit employees and seek to enhance profit at the expense of their workers and consumers. International employees frequently face deplorable working conditions and receive compensation that makes them little more than slave labor. Thus, the feminization of labor is central to our discussion.

According to a 1992 New York Department of Consumer Affairs report, there were 400,000 children under thirteen in New York City whose parents both worked and fewer than 100,000 places for

them in afterschool and daycare programs, putting thousands of unregulated, immigrant women at work (Cheever 32). Consequently, jobs such as elder care, childcare and housecleaning become the most prominent occupations for immigrant women even though the wages are low: They require no degree or special education, and especially no papers. These immigrant women become socially isolated, far away from their families; with a language gap and little potential for collective voices or labor unions, they are offered very few prospects for job mobility, careers, and no hope for advancement while rarely receiving health benefits, vacation time or sick leaves (Rivas 73). Also, because they are often either illegal or working illegally, the fear of deportation discourages them from seeking help, or complaining to the police in cases of violence, abuse, or exploitation.

Furthermore, multinational corporations are guilty of practicing unlawful trade agreements and jeopardizing the health, safety, and civil rights of their workers. With the rapid rise of multinational enterprises feeding into capitalistic western societies, a vast number of women, especially in the global south, are suffering. Mohanty provides numerous examples of the exploitation and frustrations women in the developing world must face as a result of globalization and capitalist corruption:

In fundamental ways, it is girls and women around the world, especially in the third world/south, that bear the brunt of globalization. Poor women and girls are the hardest hit by the degradation of environmental conditions, wars, famines, privatization of services and deregulation of governments, the dismantling of welfare states, the restructuring of paid and unpaid work, increasing surveillance and incarceration in prisons, and so on. And this is why a feminism without and beyond borders is necessary to address the injustices of global capitalism Women and girls are still 70 percent of the world's poor and the majority of the world's refugees. Girls and women comprise almost 80 percent of displaced persons of the Third World/South in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Mohanty 453).

As Mohanty argues, globalization under capitalism can only further lead to the degradation of women on an international scale. In order to initiate change, it is vital to consider how an anticapitalist global movement can be created.

In order to conceptualize just what an anticapitalist global movement would look like, Mohanty illustrates and critiques current models of pedagogy. As academic institutions are the sites "where knowledge and globalization are produced" it is necessary to establish a more innovative and radical means of instruction. In other words, antiglobalization must be a fundamental element in both feminist and international discourses within universities. Mohanty argues "that this move to internationalize women's studies curricula and the attendant pedagogies that flow from this is one of the main ways we can track a discourse of global feminism in the United States" (454). Mohanty looks to current education systems in order to examine the various pedagogical models and the ways in which "internationalized" instruction is enforced by feminist scholars within academic communities. She thinks that the best way to counter globalization and its adverse effects on women would be to forge a "Feminist Solidarity Model." Mohanty states that "It is this particular model that provides a way to theorize a complex rational understanding of experience, location, and history such that feminist cross-cultural work moves through the specific context to construct a real notion of universals and democratization rather than colonization" (455). In tracking feminist discourses and reshaping global feminism, the possibilities of penetrating current curriculums with visions of solidarity and antiglobal struggles are possible.

Before illustrating the significance of modifying feminist discourse and fully examining Mohanty's solidarity model, it is essential to address her "failed" models of instruction. Currently, most education systems function through liberal pluralistic centered learning: categories are created under the premise that a single voice or group of people can represent a community. On the surface, liberal pluralism appears to give voice and agency to a vast array of individuals from different geographical locations and diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs and practices. The motives behind this system seem admirable and reasonable: by allowing multicultural voices to be heard and providing them with an established place within the Western curriculum, enlightenment will spread and oppression end.

However, the problem here is that these voices must be *allowed* to speak; they must be *provided* a place within Western discourse. This act of granting permission creates a power structure; it reflects relations of dominance and subordinates. Liberal pluralism is immersed in politics. Affluent politicians control this power system. They decide who speaks, who will be the authentic voice that represents a culture, and how such voices will emerge and penetrate Western institutions. This suggests that while particular voices will receive recognition others may be stifled. Thus, structures of inequality are left intact and only masked with an illusion of equality and collective voice.

Under liberal pluralism the women of the developing world are typically depicted by Eurocentric women as a single, oppressed group. Through Western feminist discourse, they have come to represent a symbol of oppression and victimization. Mohanty refers to this misguided curricular perception as "Feminist-as-Tourist Model," the "add and stir model," or the "white women's burden or colonial discourse." Mohanty defines this as a "perspective in which the primary Euro-American narrative of the syllabus remains untouched, and examples from non-Western or Third World/South cultures are used to supplement and 'add' to this narrative" (456). Typically, women are not seen in mundane settings, but generally embody stereotypical images of sexual violence and poverty. For the most part, resistance is ignored. Also, "Since in this paradigm feminism is always/already constructed as Euro-American in origin and development, women's lives and struggles outside this geographical context only serve to confirm or contradict this original feminist (master) narrative" (456). This clearly establishes binaries and equates the West with development and authority while women of the developing world are perceived as docile, primitive, and submissive. These binaries are opposed to the ideals of most gender departments: to critique and dismantle oppressive patriarchal stereotypes. Thus, in their representation of non Euro-American women, Western feminists suffer from a contradiction that has the oppressed imitating the oppressor. The next curricular approach Mohanty presents is the "feminist as explorer model." "This particular pedagogical perspective originates in the area studies, where the 'foreign' woman is the object and subject of knowledge and the larger intellectual project is entirely about countries other than the United States" (456). Most institutions with a gender department offer courses like these, which are dedicated entirely to the study of countries geographically and historically outside the West. Courses such as "Women in Muslim Society" or "Women in Latin America" are constructed to internationalize curricular studies and expand the global arsenal of feminist scholars. On the surface, this appears ideal: voices of non Euro-American women penetrate canonical Western literature and challenge predominating Eurocentric thought. Unfortunately, this creates a distinctive binary; educators inadvertently set up an equation of "us and them" or "separate but equal." Under this model, Edward Said's notion of "otherness" is perpetuated. The course titles alone set up a distinction, a historical, social, and political separation, and a recreation of "the orient." The results of this are numerous and devastating. Since the United States is typically excluded from this model and Western politics go unaddressed, these binaries generate separations and disconnections. Mohanty explains that, "unless these discrete spaces [geographical and cultural] are taught in relation to one another, the story told is usually a cultural relativism with no real connection or common basis for evaluation" (457). Thus, students find it difficult to identify with non Euro-American histories. In extreme cases, students may think that racism and classism are "Third World" problems, happening in countries too far away to matter. Furthermore, "If the dominant discourse is the discourse of cultural relativism, questions of power, agency, justice, and common criteria for critique and evaluation are silenced" (Mohanty 457). These issues cannot be addressed without acknowledging U.S. involvement.

Furthermore there must be a link between local and global endeavors. In Mohanty's third pedagogical approach, she argues for a "Feminist Solidarity or Comparative Feminist Studies Model." This strategy is "based on the premise that the local and the global are not defined in terms of physical geography or territory but exist simultaneously and constitute each other" (458). In the teaching of this model, transnational feminism has a better chance to flourish because the differences and similarities that exist across borders emphasize our interconnectedness not our otherness.

Mohanty seeks to establish a “comparative course that shows the interconnectedness of the histories, experiences, and struggles of US women of color, white women, and women from the Third World/South” (458). Through this model, social hierarchies can be dismantled, and a feminist discourse that transcends, time, race, religion, class, and sexual orientation, take shape. Mohanty proposes “organizing syllabi around social and economic processes and histories of various communities of women, in particular substantive areas like sex work, militarization, environmental justice, the prison/industrial complex, and human rights” (458). Under this model an antiglobalization movement can grow, highlighting corporate inequalities and progressing toward global equity for women’s labor. Such a curriculum may undo a legacy of violence against women. It can challenge oppressive and exploitative injustices brought about by capitalistic domination and ruthless globalization. Finally, Mohanty’s Model can exchange the Western gaze for a more cross-cultural lens that fosters solidarity and social justice.

Transnational feminist practices should therefore depend on building feminist solidarities across the division of class, gender, ethnicity or sexuality, connecting women to each other, and working towards the same goal of peace, and equality. Indeed, the best way to achieve this goal would be to recognize differences between different First and Third World feminisms, so we can better appreciate connections and commonalities. Because neither borders nor boundaries are rigidly determined, no struggle is unique. It is through difference that we can explain the connections we share, theorizing universal concerns, especially regarding women’s marginalization and hierarchal hegemonies. As the world grows smaller, and a new transnational metiza culture is created, we need to emphasize mutuality, co-responsibility, and common interests within feminist solidarities, and embrace differences as a means to greater knowledge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anzaldúa, Gloria. “La Conciencia De La Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness.” 1987.

Feminist Theory Reader. 2nd ed. Ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim. New York: Routledge, 2003. 254-62.

Croucher, Sheila. “Gendering Globalization, Globalizing Gender.” *In Globalization and Belonging*. 149-185.

Jagger, Alison M., “Is Globalization Good for Women?” *Comparative Literature*, 53/4, (Autumn 2001). 298-317. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593521>>.

Mohanty, Chandra. “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles.” 2003. *Feminist Theory Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim. New York: Routledge, 2003. 446-462.

Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

The Combahee River Collective. “A Black Feminist Statement” 1977. *Feminist Theory Reader*. 2nd ed. Ed. Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim. New York: Routledge, 2003. 106-112.