

Ethnocentrism and coloniality in Latin American feminisms: the complicity and consolidation of hegemonic feminists in transnational spaces

By Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso

Translated by Ana-Maurine Lara, MPhil

Originally published in: VENEZUELAN JOURNAL OF WOMEN STUDIES

July/December 2009. VOL. 14. No. 33 - pp. 37-54

For several decades Latin American feminism¹ has been developing a critical framework and politic that (unsuccessfully) attempts to take into account racial and class inequalities - inequalities affecting a significant percentage of the women in the region. This framework and approach, based on the politics of inclusion, was evident as early as the III Encuentro Feminista de America Latina y el Caribe, which took place in Brazil in 1985. This gathering marked the first time that Latin American feminists and feminism attempted to incorporate the issues of the “black woman” and her “representatives”² into its agenda.

Despite the early presence (although not really, taking into account the multi-ethnic and afro-descendent formation of the continent) of these conflicts over class and racial-ethnic privilege, the “question” has taken up relatively little space in the on-going discourses and concerns of Latin-American feminism. We can confirm that, in general, the tensions that emerged over the multiplicity of women’s origins and social conditions have remained dormant, reappearing time to time in the form of unresolved conflict, or because of an item brought to our attention by the United Nations agenda. Not at any point do these conflicts or engagements significantly affect or modify the appearance or the dominant practices of regional feminism.

¹ In this paper I am using identity categories and terms that are inherently problematic, such as “Latin American feminism,” “Third World feminism,” “from the North,” “from the South,” “...Western,” assuming the critical approach proposed by post-colonial authors such as Chandra Mohanty. Explicitly, the use of these terms does not imply an attempt at homogenization. These terms must be geopolitically and historically contextualized and here they are used in order to locate and denounce the consolidation of determined “subject positions.” In any case, the use of these terms also does not foreclose the need to maintain a critical engagement with the complexity and agency that they imply, something which I will attempt to demonstrate in this essay could happen to authors even as critical as Mohanty. As I will demonstrate, the idea of a “Third World feminism” represented in the space of the transnational is a result of the consolidation of determined hegemonies within local contexts. As always, the business of representation implies power plays, liberatory battles within groups over the definitions for representation. This power structure has to be uncovered, as must its reaches into the positioning of subjects in postcolonial contexts.

² We recall that this debate was sparked at the Brazil gathering, when a group of poor and black women from the favelas attempted to enter the gathering for free. While the organizing committee noted the great number of scholarships that were allocated for poor and black women, and denounced the political maneuvering of the political parties – an attempt which they said aimed to discredit feminism – the incident highlighted that “for many of the participants, especially the militant women from the then emergent black women’s movement, insisted that the questions of race and class didn’t occupy a central place within the Gathering’s agenda, and that the black and poor women had no significant role in elaborating [the Gathering’s] agenda...” (Sonia Alvarez, et al. 2003: 548)

Usually the "question" is still laid out as "the problem of black and indigenous women" and it is only thus that it is included in the planning process, or on panels or in gatherings³, or in some interventionist projects or programs usually designed and managed by professional middle class and white supremacist feminists from throughout the continent.

However, we cannot deny that at this moment the some of the most central concerns of global feminism include debates about multiculturalism, the explosion of identities and a preoccupation with the [feminist] subjects central to our policies. This is most evident in the opportune and repeated mention of "... class, race, gender and sexuality " as required language for any academic text or speech of any kind that lays claim to advanced or liberal thought. And, no one would admit today, much less within feminist circles, that race exists as a natural condition that marks expected behavior or a specific personal quality. Thus, within a context that seems to favor attention to the problem, I am encouraged and interested in discussing and framing an approach to race and class within Latin American feminism. I am also interested in identifying those conditions that have historically prevented adequate discussion of these systems of oppression within an analysis of regional feminism and politics.

In this paper I put forward some hypotheses about the particular historical constitution of Latin American feminism within the context of postcoloniality. I also consider the ways in which unequal geopolitical conditions have produced an ideological dependence among Latin American feminists on the processes and production of discourses in the First World. This analysis deconstructs how this dependence has come to define the theoretical and political emphases of a situated framework and praxis. It also brings attention to the ways in which this postcolonial imprint conditions and determines, without a doubt, the feminist subject, as well as the urgent political imperatives emerging in the region.

³ We must recognize that this "divisive" or "homogenous fragmentation of the categories of oppression" as stated by Maria Lugones (2005: 66-68), has been a "typical" strategy by which feminism has been able to respond to the demands of representation which have emerged from the collapse of the universal female subject: the white heterosexist universal female woman. This has been so because "for the Western civilizing project it is much easier to add, aggregate, as though the difference is a mathematical issue, a sum of identities, of categories" as Amalia Fischer (2002, mimeo) reminds us. The attempts to disengage from the essentialist quagmire which this type of approach leads to have primarily emerged from the theorizations from the movements of women of color and lesbians in the United States. For an interesting look at these attempts at overcoming this identity fragmentation, with proposals such as Kimberle Crenshaw's "intersectionality", read: Maria Lugones (2005). For a good example of this fragmented and essentialist approach to the oppression of women, I recommend looking at the structure and the preparatory process for the XI Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe, which took place in Mexico City in 2009.

In a moment in which reflections on the feminist subject and on feminist bodies is present as never before, I ask myself who has occupied the material space of these latent reflections. Why, I ask, has this current preoccupation limited itself to the gendered, sexualized body in ways that fail to articulate or ask questions about how the policies of racialization and impoverishment also define bodies and beings in a region like Latin America? How has it come to be that Latin American feminism has not taken advantage of this burst of theoretical production on the abject body to articulate a necessary argument about the expropriated bodies of women within the history of the continent's geopolitical and discursive colonization? When, within our social movements, and most specifically within feminism, a space has been opened that enables the visibilization and recuperation of subject positions previously unrecognized, which bodies have become the objects representing this neglect? And, which bodies have been once again misrepresented and why?

In this essay, I draw on the analytical strategy proposed by Chandra Mohanty in her work, "Under Western eyes. Feminist Academy and colonial discourse "(2008a [1986])⁴ and "Under Western Eyes' revisited: feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles" (2008b [2003])⁵. I am interested in focusing on three hypotheses she maintains and develops in these texts:

1. That there is a *discursive colonization* within the academic practice of Western feminism over and of Third World women and their struggles, which we must both deconstruct and dismantle.

2. To move from deconstructive criticism to a "reconstruction," Western feminism must be able to identify the pressing problems of the women most marginalized by our neoliberal context. To do so requires adopting a methodology based on the notion of *epistemic privilege*, in which we assume a view from the bottom up,

⁴ The original article was published as "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" in the journal *Boundary 2* (Spring/Fall 1984) 12 (3)/13 (1): 333 – 358. For this paper, I have used the Spanish language version, translated by Maria Vinos for Rosalva Aida Hernandez Castillo and Liliana Suarez Navaz (eds) (2008), pp. 117 – 164 – galley copies.

⁵ The original article was titled (2003) "Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs* 28 (2), pp - This article uses the Spanish language translation by Mary and Ricardo Vinos, provided as a pre-press document, also published in Hernandez Castillo & Suarez Navaz (2008), pp 407 – 464.

which starts in the poorest and most marginalized communities in the world in order to “access and make visible the mechanisms of power... within the ascending scale of privilege.”

3. In the present context there exists the need and the possibility of a *transnational feminist* community, anticapitalist and decolonized, sustained by the idea of "common differences," which attends to a fight against the nefarious effects of globalization, and which establishes a horizon of universal solidarity and justice.

To examine these hypotheses from the Latin American context, I would like to present and contrast two theories posited by Gayatri Spivak which I find highly effective for the purposes of my argument:

The first theory is that of the subaltern, and the impossibility of the subaltern's speech (or listening)

(Spivak: 2003 [1988]). The second is that of postcolonial reason – sustained by the nation-building and citizenship projects of dominant postcolonial elites and intellectuals – which encrypts the subaltern, simultaneously requiring her and foreclosing her (Spivak: 1999).

My concern has to do with the supposition that a transnational feminism, enacted in the name of 'feminist solidarity' – such as that suggested by Mohanty - assumes the location of *epistemic privilege*, and posits that it may help the Latin American subaltern⁶ overcome her mute and under-represented state. From my critical perspective, which emerges from the conjunction between activism and academia, this is not only naïve, but also signals the great distance between feminists in the North – including women native to the South but geopolitically located in the North – from the problems and vicissitudes of women's lives within the region, and from the paths of Latin American feminism.

⁶ I extrapolate from the subject as theorized by Mohanty as “the most marginalized women in the world, communities of women of color in rich neocolonial nations, women from the Third World/South or Two Thirds World” (2008b: 14) in conjunction with Spivak's subaltern subject and postcolonial studies. “The term subaltern is drawn from Gramsci's political theory...The Subaltern Studies groups which emerged in the 1980s...gave new political economic meaning to the word...to refer to an inferior or dominated status, a social conflict, to signify in a general way those who are excluded by the social order and in order to analyze their agentive possibilities.” (Maria Jose Vega 2009: 2) We must remember that for Spivak, the subaltern – in its most agitated form – would be expressed in the figure of a poor black Third World woman (Spivak 2003).

On Discursive Colonization

When speaking of discursive colonization, Mohanty is speaking to the academic practices of Western feminism; these practices have repercussions on the lives and struggles of Third World women (2008b: 1). Mohanty proposed the concept in 1986, in her essay "Under Western Eyes," which sets out to critically address and revise the theoretical underpinnings of Western feminism and its euro-centric methodologies, falsely universalized in the service of its own interests. As she points out, the seeming intention of this critique was to denounce the highlight the nexus between power and knowledge, while simultaneously rendering visible the political and material implications of these forms of knowledge production and its discourses for women (monolithically constructed) in the Third World. (2008a: 1-2)

For Mohanty,

Any discussion of the intellectual and political construction of 'third world feminisms' must address itself to two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of hegemonic "Western" feminisms, and the formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically, and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies. (2008a: 1).

As it is for Mohanty, I, too have spent many years on my fundamental project. This project aims to think through Latin American feminism, its many narratives, discourses, and proposals and its central and marginal practices. Like Mohanty, I attempt to critically engage the movement, with a thorough acknowledgement of my particular geopolitical location. I also attempt to stand outside of hegemonic Western feminisms. My critique, and the language of my critique, is informed by my historical and political interests, as well as by the reality of the most-exercised forms of feminism extant in my region. In particular, I am interested in reflecting on the modes by which this discursive colonization of third world women by feminists in the North is fed by the complicity of hegemonic feminists in the South. I want to not only reflect, but also ascertain not only the modes of colonization, but also the coloniality of the discourses produced by hegemonic feminists from the South.

If Mohanty states this possible continuity between the hegemonic feminists from the North and South⁷, this is not her primary focus, as she is more concerned in thinking about her own feminist community. This leaves the door wide open for further work in this area. In general, self-criticism (and reflection) is less welcome in the restricted, disadvantaged and narrow contexts of third world production and feminist political praxis⁸. In this paper, I am choosing to focus on questions related to this possibility.

First, I note the obvious: as we are reminded by Ochy Curiel (2009) and Breny Mendoza (2008) Latin American feminism has bourgeois, white / mestizo, urban, and hetero-normative origins. To point out this origin is not a minor detail. There is extensive documentation of the ways in which the ruling and intellectual classes, among which we can place [the majority of] feminists, were directly influenced by North American/European political and ideological agendas. If indeed feminism in the South was fed by the ideas of emancipation and equality so present among feminist struggles in Europe and the United States, then surely we have to also admit the ethnocentric inheritances of that endorsement. Alongside this acknowledgment, we can also agree with Spivak and Mohanty about their thesis regarding the eurocentrism and colonialism inherent to the theoretical production of hegemonic Western feminisms.

Following this line of analysis, I would like to echo the criticism proposed by Breny Mendoza (2008) which asserts the complicity of local hegemonic feminism with what would be the perpetuation of the Eurocentric/Northern ideologies, and by extension the continuance of the colonialist project in Latin America.

⁷ My reference to "Western feminism" is by no means intended to imply that it is a monolith. Rather, I am attempting to draw attention to the similar effects of various textual strategies used by particular writers that codify Others as non-Western and hence themselves as (implicitly) Western. It is in this sense that I use the term "Western feminist." The analytic principles discussed below serve to distort Western feminist political practices, and limit the possibility of coalitions among (usually White) Western feminists and working class and feminists of color around the world. These limitations are evident in the construction of the (implicitly consensual) priority of issues around which apparently all women are expected to organize. The necessary and integral connection between feminist scholarship and feminist political practice and organizing determines the significance and status of Western feminist writings on women in the third world, for feminist scholarship, like most other kinds of scholarship, is not the mere production of knowledge about a certain subject. It is a directly political and discursive practice in that it is purposeful and ideological. (Mohanty 1984: 334)

⁸ I cannot fail to mention that attempts to produce a forceful critique about Latin American feminism and its complicity with projects anathema to the radical transformation of patriarchy have been continuously delegitimized by regional hegemonic feminisms and their accomplices, including those within the academy whose work is focuses on gender. The most relevant example, because of how it has been systematized and sustained over time, has been the critical knowledge produced by grassroots, autonomous feminist intellectuals. Even though the content of their knowledge production is little known nor legitimated within most Latin American spaces of knowledge production, there is a great deal of documentation. For more information, read the chapter "The Latinamerican Feminist Utopia" in Francesca Gargallo (2004) *Ideas feministas latinoamericanas*. Universidad de la Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico.

If Francesca Gargallo (2004:11) asks, "Why did Latin American feminism, in the 1990s, stop looking for the theoretical sustenance of its politics, within its own practices, experimentation and in the history of its reflections?" then Mendoza demonstrates how this was always the case. She states, "Latin American feminists [attached themselves] to Anglo-Saxon feminism (in its liberal, radical and Marxist forms) to construct their organizations and alternative approaches to social and cultural change." (2008: 171). But not only this. This attachment to the Western emancipation ideologies and projects not only has served Latin American feminist projects. It has also had dire consequences in that it has contributed to the positioning of a gaze and of political objectives that are explicitly exclusive of women from specific origins, socio-economic classes and sexuality – across the continent.

Using this line of argument as a type of example, Mendoza explores the contemporary connections between the 1980s democratization projects - to which many feminists in the region ascribed - and the new forms of neoliberal imperialist policies that emerged *for* Latin America at the end of the Cold War. She reminds us that, "the implementation of the ideology of democracy within Latin American postcolonial realities" by the Allied countries, occurred primarily through the mechanisms of [international] cooperation. She also recalls how simultaneously, nascent transnational spaces in which the discourses and recipes for development aid were produced, occurred through and around the United Nations mega conferences. Mendoza identifies how this scenario extends strategies aimed at restoring and reconfiguring the links between colonial centers and peripheries, as well as within each global pole (e.g. North, South/East, West). Launching this critique within the realm of academic discourse, just as before it had been launched within the space of autonomous activism, she again points out how we must not ignore the political complicity of hegemonic feminism with these policies and projects within the region. As an example, she recounts the now-celebrated negotiations for equality that were carried out in the 1990s between the Latin American feminist movement and corrupt neoliberal governments. In doing so, she asks

How did it come to be that [feminists] transformed themselves into an appendage, and even into accomplices of the neocolonial plan? How is it that Latin American feminism continues, within the space of democracy, to cultivate a socio-economic and political-cultural structure in which many of the ideas about gender and race, alongside other legacies of colonialism, and the same patriarchal power structures,

and the same cruelty and corruption of the military and rulers of the past, are maintained? (Ibid: 171-174)

Mendoza answers her own question, lamenting that:

Latin American feminists were not able to develop a conceptual and political strategy that would support them in better understanding and negotiating the neocolonial relations that structure life in the subcontinent...[Remembering that] Latin American feminist episteme has been constructed...through the displacement of our local geo-cultural consciousness by theorems emerging from distant realities...Paradoxically, this dysfunction within the feminists conceptual apparatus leads to a misrecognition of what specific Latin American realities are, and generates a political practice with major consequences. (Ibid: 174-175)

Thus, the colonality of the discursive practices of hegemonic feminisms in the Third World, or at least in Latin America, lead to the reproduction of an Other within feminism, across the continent. This Other includes: Afro-descended and indigenous women, lesbians, laborers, sex workers, peasants, and poor women. The effects of discursive colonization produced by Western feminisms imply an intrinsic colonality within those discourses produced by Latin American feminisms. So much so that [coloniality] is no longer just an attribute of First World feminisms. Across our homelands, this has at least two consequences: 1) the definition, in collusion and with frank dependence on the hegemonic feminisms of the imperial North, of the guidelines and issues that inform the thought and action of local feminism; 2) the absorption (phagocytosis) of the subaltern people of these lands through their (extensive) representation by elite national women and hegemonic feminists groups.

In terms of the former, we find examples by tracing the evolution of the key [feminist] debates within academia and the feminist movement. We can also see this play out in the problems addressed by the research and academic programs on gender and sexuality offered in Latin American universities in the past few years.

It is no secret that the focus within regional feminist scholarship has shifted to the study of identities. Gioconda Herrera (1999), in her review of the research carried out in the field of gender studies, demonstrates an explosion of research focused on questions of identity. She

shows how these programs, on the one hand, limit themselves to mere description without a detailing of how these identities are produced within the specific context of power. On the other hand, this scope and focus of this research has not allowed for an exploration of how these different categories of identity articulate with each other.

Unfortunately these studies, following the interests, strategies and concepts legitimized in countries in the North, have focused primarily on the study of dissident sexualities and gender identity without being able to account for the irreversible crosslinking of these orders (production of desire, sexuality and gender) with those of race and class. Nor have they addressed how the constitution of sexual and gender identity would be produced within of a particular configuration of the Latin American nation-states, their colonial inheritances and discursive colonization. In this vein Herrera concludes that:

Under the influence of some feminisms and identity politics, any recognition of heterogeneity, diversity and the particular has gained increasing ground. [Notwithstanding], in academic practice, policy and in development, this recognition tends to remain both formal and descriptive. This raises some questions: How to analytically articulate gender, race, ethnicity, and social class in order to explain the ways in which social inequality hinders and blocks development processes in our countries? How to do this beyond mere description? ... (Ibid.: 6).

Similar to Mendoza's hypothesis, Herrera's study demonstrates how in a context like that of Latin America, the production of an identity politic within the feminist body politics have been developed based on imported conceptual frameworks. This has occurred without the kind of mediation that would allow for the re-appropriation of those (many times abstracted beyond the question through the concept of gender) whose material reality results in the racialized, impoverished, folkloricized, colonized bodies of Latin American women⁹. The reification of the absence of indigenous, afro and poor bodies within this body of work, demonstrates the limits of the feminist subject, and the necessity of amplifying those limits. It is also disturbing and at the same time symptomatic of how knowledge production – even in this phase of the

⁹ In support of this idea, Herrera demonstrates in her preliminary study (restricted to Andean countries) the influence of the transnational agenda of the UN and its development aid bodies (the Beijing Platform, the Campaign for Women's Human Rights, the general orientation of international bodies, among others) in the ways in which even the investigative emphasis is defined, which she shows are very similar in the five countries featured in the study. (ibid 3)

“decentralization of the universal feminist subject still contains the eurocentric and universalist center and does not manage to loosen itself from this historical mode of colonization, no matter the grade of critique.” (Curiel 2009: 9).

Taking this paradigmatic example, I propose to think through how the underlying debates, themes and agendas of regional feminist scholarship are not only being trapped (colonized) by the conceptual and analytic frameworks of Northern feminisms, but also to demonstrate how they also play a critical role in the universalization of these interpretive frameworks in the production of contemporary colonial subjects. What I am attempting to denounce here is that, if there is a discursive colonization of women and their struggles within the third world, this has not only resulted from the hegemonic feminisms of the North, but also because Northern hegemonic feminisms have invariably counted on the complicity and the compromises of hegemonic feminists in the South and their own class, racial, normative sexual and gender policies, and in their investments in their social standing and the status quo. There are even many feminists, who thanks to their class and race privileges (although still at a disadvantage in relation to their peers in the North) have, in their own countries, benefited from the Western and ethnocentric conceptual frameworks that produce – as their constitutive other – “black, indian, poor, lesbian, ignorant woman of the third world.” They actively participate in the project that makes both agency and the subaltern’s voice an impossibility. .

It is because of this that I must confess, I am skeptical of Mohanty’s proposed methodology suggesting that a transnational feminism should adopt the notion of epistemic privilege. Similar to Spivak’s critique of the post-colonial intellectuals within the school of Subaltern Studies, I fear that hegemonic feminisms on both sides of the Atlantic have contributed to the colonial project of inscribing the “third world woman;” an inscription which occurs within the historical expulsion of how the Western white nation forced the assimilation of ideals, and the reliance of this nation on the (true) Other. If feminists in the North have needed the figure of the “third world woman,” feminists (white/mestiza, bourgeoisie) in the South have needed and have actively worked to construct their local Other, in order to integrate themselves into the nationalist Eurocentricizing production discourses of Latin American nation-states. The epistemic violence¹⁰ is such that “the third world woman” is doubly trapped by the discursive

¹⁰ By epistemic violence I am speaking of one form in which to make the other invisible, appropriating her of her possibilities for self-representation: “it relates to the amendment, the edition, the erasure and even the annulment of

colonization of Western feminism by a) which Northern feminists construct the monolithic Latin American “Other” and b) the discursive practices of feminists in the South, who, establishing a certain distance while simultaneously maintaining continuity with the matrices of colonial privilege, construct her [the poor, black, indigenous, peasant or working woman] as the other within the Other.

Within this double construction of the “most deprived women in the world,” there is no possible access to the revelatory truth of subordinate experiences. As Spivak states, the subaltern cannot speak. Her voice remains eclipsed by all the discourses about her. Her experiences colonized by them. The hope of accessing that privileged point of view is self-deception. Mohanty’s intention to avail herself of the notion of epistemic privilege seems to suggest the possibility of adopting “a point of view from which to access an adequate, true and objective representation” of the lives and problems of the most dispossessed women in the world, but we know this effort is a disaster (Tozzi 2005). In part because:

Epistemic privilege...identifies a political formulation (oppressors should listen to the voices and give credit to marginalized voices) with an epistemological formulation (marginalized people have an unassailable and special position regarding oppression). This is what Bat-Ami Bar On (1993: 96) argues in observing that “the claims for epistemological privilege made by a socially marginalized group are ultimately normative, and pandering to those who are already theoretically convinced, generally groups of those members of the marginalized group who are empowered by those claims.” It seems advisable not to emphasize epistemological privilege, but rather how to displace epistemological authority, given that this authority is what really matters in efforts to make it possible to listen to insurgent knowledge. (Angeleri, Sandra; 2009).

Perhaps what Chandra Mohanty, following Sathya Mohanty- recognized for her defense and careful development of the concept - is trying to tell us is:

[that] the urgency and need to be concerned about the situation of the oppressed and consequently this meeting will make us revise our beliefs simply because we

not only symbolic systems, subjectification and representation that others have within themselves, but also the concrete modes of representation, registration, and memories of their experiences.” (Maritza Belasteguigoitia, 2001: 236-237)

discover that others think differently. In one case, it is about privilege or political recognition and in the other, there is a heuristic motivation. (Tozzi, 2005)

Thus, if epistemic privilege does not allow unrestricted access to any of the truths of this "third world woman," we must once again begin: there is no spoken illusion to guide us or save us from the overarching ethical question. How can privileged feminists in the North and South assume historical responsibility in the transformation of women's lives around the world? How do we ensure that our form of feminism is not complicit with the neocolonial interests focused on the material and symbolic production of subjects for its exploitation and domination? The question is not outside of, but within ourselves. That is why I now turn to a final proposal put forth by Chandra Mohanty in her essay.

The possibility of a "transnational community" as a model of radical feminist practice

In her revision of "Under Western eyes ...", Mohanty tells us that she has felt compelled to return to the text after sixteen years, not only to clarify some of her original ideas, but also to "move explicitly from critique to reconstruction." (2003: 500). I turn now to her proposal, as stated, made within a considerably changed context. She is committed to demonstrating what she maintains was perhaps not sufficiently clear: her confidence in the possibility of an academic practice committed to global justice beyond the borders of First World feminisms. In this sense, she does not see the impossibility of an "egalitarian and non-colonizing trans-cultural academic practice." She explains that for her, the antagonisms between Western feminisms and Third World feminisms are not structured in such a way that forecloses the possibility of solidarity between them. Garnering hope from the example of transnational struggles against globalized capital, and admitting the current stagnation of First World feminisms, Mohanty proposes that feminists look to these movements to articulate an anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal and antiracist struggle. (2008b)

Many share Mohanty's illusion. Among the well fed academics and activists of her generation, including Nancy Fraser¹¹ and those much younger, on both sides of the Atlantic, in

¹¹ Fraser (2004) thinks fondly of the production of a space in which the confluence of feminist struggles on a global level and puts her hopes in a feminist activism focused on the future: "For my purposes, the history of second-wave feminism divides into three phases...In a third phase, finally, feminism is increasingly practiced as a transnational politics, emerging in transnational spaces...In Europe and elsewhere, however, feminists have discovered, and are skillfully exploiting, new political opportunities in the transnational political spaces of our globalizing world. Thus, they are reinventing feminism yet again – this time as a project and process of transnational politics. Although this

the North and South, the proposal of carrying out political actions beyond the national borders is a common scenario. The process leading up to the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women drew together women from all parts of the globe in an unprecedented mobilization. As a result, and soon following, this great deterritorialized market resulting from the confluence of movements was financed and diversified under the patronage of the UN, and bilateral and multi-lateral finance bodies working under the banner of "development aid." The conferences, meetings and gatherings tending to diversity agendas have multiplied; the birth of organizations and global networks fighting for human rights (sexual and reproductive, legal abortion, sustainable economies, education and "sexual diversity") connected trans-continental feminisms; and as Mendoza reminds us, this meant – in concrete terms – the majoritarian displacement of local activism by movements focused on the international arena (2008: 172).

In this way, the efforts leading up to Beijing in 1995 characterize the new unipolar political reconfiguration that followed the fall of the socialist block and the end of the Cold War (ibid). But in contrast to the enthusiasm demonstrated by some academics from the South who are located in the United States, Mendoza demonstrates the connection between the demobilization of local feminism - of which Mohanty complains within her own local context (2008b)- and the growing commitment to the transnational agenda that is strongly supported and financed by international bodies.

The fracture that occurred between autonomous and institutionalized feminists within Latin American feminist circles points to this tension. While among much of the mainstream feminist leadership and their base, there was a great enthusiasm for the preparatory process leading up the Fourth World Conference on Women (based and strengthened within privatized NGOs), a small but strong group of feminists in the region dissented. Dominated by Las Complices, this group engaged in a thorough analysis of the situation and of the growing political changes. They delivered an early warning at the VI Latin American and Caribbean

third phase is still very young, it portends a change in the scale of feminist politics that could make it possible to integrate the best aspects of the previous two phases in a new and more adequate synthesis." Fraser, Nancy (2005) "Mapping the Feminist Imagination: From redistribution to recognition to representation" in *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press), p 102.

Feminists Conference in El Salvador, 1993¹², which resulted in an irreconcilable polarization within the Latin American movement.

What in the North can be celebrated with positive eyes (eyes of the West) had nefarious consequences for the Latin American feminist movement. The space of feminist solidarity without borders has been a profitable space for a few privileged women in the South who, thanks to their class, origin, color privileges, or thanks to their access to sources of income, have obtained prestige and improved personal status. The emergence of this new deterritorialized activist camp has meant a real disconnection between local/regional feminist leadership and their bases, and has also led to a process of specialization, professionalization and technocratization of feminism. This has led to further fragmentation and division of the struggles and movement. I am pointing to the consolidation of an elite feminism which, in spaces that are accessible to only a few and in alliance with feminists from the First World, determine movements' priorities. These priorities, disputed in an endless negotiation with the global economic powers represented in these spaces and through international decision making mechanisms are, at the same time, "approved" by the interests and gaze of feminists in the North. So there is little hope left that, within these spaces, we would see the "voices and experiences of Third World women" represented. Once again, they are foreclosed within and between the hegemonic discourses serving the neocolonial and imperialist plans for the South and through its representatives in the global North and South. If the afro-descended, or the indigenous, mestiza woman, mother or lesbian, wage laborer, peasant or outside of the formal market, student or illiterate, monolingual or bilingual, expelled to the First World by poverty or war...if these women are named, if they are the objects of discourse and policies, even though the "compromised" feminists of the South and the North "speak for her", she is definitely not there.

Belief in the plausibility of global alliance politics is prevalent among women of dominant social groups interested in 'international feminism' in the comprador countries. At the other end of the scale, those most separated from any possibility of an alliance among 'women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients and homosexuals' [FD – 216] are the females of the urban sub-proletariat. In their

¹² The document is titled "Manifiesto from the Accomplices to her sisters en route," signed by Margarita Pisano, Ximena Bedregal, Francesca Gargallo, Amalia Fischer, Edda Gaviola, Sandra Lidid and Rosa Rojas (See: Gargallo 2004: 185-213).

case, the denial and withholding of consumerism and the structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations. On the other side of the international division of labor, the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation even if the absurdity of the non-representing intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. (Spivak 2003: 329-330).

Contrary to the enthusiasm and commitment of feminists in and from the North who are concerned about the real problem of being disconnected from “the most pressing problems of Third World women” (whether this is in Europe, the United States or in the Third World), the fact is that since its inception this transnational space has demonstrated - for those in the South (and in the North) who knew how to look - its limits and deceptions. If there is truly a need to strengthen ties between feminists on an international level, it is not this new globalized space which will serve us.

In any case, it is important to remember that feminists – just like Leftists – have always been international. The feminist gatherings of Latin America and the Caribbean, from their beginnings in the 1980s demonstrated this intention. And there are many examples between movements. Despite this, I believe that now the challenge is – without losing sight of these connections – to recuperate the small space of community (in its multiple meanings). And focusing on local processes, which are occurring within whole communities. There aren’t many examples, but the ones that do exist include: the land less movement in Brazil (movimento sem terra), the Mapuche struggle for land in Chile, the dreams and desire of reconfiguring the state as a Great Community of communities in Bolivia¹³, and the radical uprisings of peoples in the Amazon against NAFTA, in Peru...

Compromised feminists know that we have large debts with the world’s dislodged women, but the hopes are not that these women will gain an audible voice that mirrors our discourse because that that requirement only gives way to the staging that has historically trapped and condemned them.

¹³ This concept was proposed by Julieta Paredes from Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad and the Feminist Assembly. As an example of a feminist intervention in the material and symbolic re-structuring of the Bolivian nation, she proposed the developed of processes that “epistemologically break away from Western feminism” as well as the creation of a communitarian feminism. (Julieta Paredes 2008)