

Transnational Pedagogy: Doing Political Work in Women's Studies

An Interview with Chandra Talpade Mohanty

Ena Dua and Alissa Trotz, editors

For more than two decades, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's work has framed the issues for global feminist organizing. Her article, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1991), has become a touchstone for feminists struggling to grapple with the relations of imperialism and their implications for feminism. It interrogated the ways in which geographic location and different histories structure relationships between feminists; in particular, it considered how a Western gaze defined feminist knowledge of Third World women. This seminal article gave voice to the struggle of many Third World feminists to gain an equal space within global feminist praxis, and has led to a redefining of power relationships between First World and Third World feminists. During the past decade, feminists have been addressing another set of challenges. A new phase of globalization is transforming women's work and lives throughout the world. In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (1997), co-edited with Jacqui Alexander, Mohanty's writing continues to frame the issues for feminist organizing in this new era. Importantly, she has suggested that located within this conjuncture are new opportunities for organizing - opportunities that are tied to the increasing similarities between women's work in North and South locations.

In June, 2001, Chandra Talpade Mohanty was a visiting scholar at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, where she co-taught a specially run seminar series on anti-racist feminism. While in Toronto, she also gave a public lecture on globalization and the academy. We approached Chandra to see if she would share some of her views with a larger audience. Particularly on our minds was the challenge of creating a transnational, as opposed to

a global feminist, politics. Also on our minds was the challenge of rethinking women's studies through a transnational lens.

We were interested in exploring the ways in which implicit forms of nationalism continued to shape feminist knowledge and politics. Before we were able to carry out the interview, the events of September 11 took place. The wave of American nationalism, and the ability of the United States to impose its hegemony on international politics, has devastated many of our hopes for the possibilities of transnational feminism. It has brought a new urgency to exploring questions of power in international politics and national difference, as well as the ways in which feminism/women's studies might challenge the hegemony of Western dominance.

In this interview we explore a number of wide-ranging questions with Chandra. We begin by exploring gendered/feminist perspectives on globalisation, and ask to what extent these perspectives have made their way into the mainstream. We discuss how the events of September 11th have been gendered in very particular ways. In the final two sections of the interview, Chandra reflects on her own involvement in grassroots activism, and offers some thoughts on feminist activism within the academy. Chandra ends by reflecting on the ways in which internationalization is taking place within women's studies.

GENDERING GLOBALIZATION: WHERE ARE WE AT?

Ena

In your writing, one of your central arguments has been that gender is constitutive of globalization.

How does one make that relationship visible?

Chandra

I think it is critical to try to connect some of the larger questions of political economy to questions of subjectivity and identity and community. Those connections are central to thinking about gender and globalization. If we do a good job, then I think it becomes possible to see that while the effects of globalization on most disenfranchised communities are pretty devastating, it's also true that it opens up certain possibilities for women as well.

Making connections between political economy and questions of subjectivity and identity and agency enable us to present a narrative that explicitly encodes the complexities of women's lives under globalization, that doesn't present us with caricatures of women. It's important for us to recreate more comprehensive stories of women's lives and agencies within this context, to combat the monolithic images that are circulated about women as victims.

A good example is what is happening now, post September 11. For instance, one of the ways feminists could contest the whole discourse around the war against terror would be to really point out the history of the resistance of women within Islamic culture and communities; to create much more nuanced stories about their lives, the choices they have made about the different forms of rule in those contexts and what was possible for them.

Revealing these layers of complexity makes it possible to disrupt the kinds of images that are monolithic and get coopted immediately. A singular solitary image without any depth to it is easy to coopt and weave into your particular self-interest. This is what's happening now with all these discourses of protectionism that seem to be mobilized on behalf of Afghani women. The discussion needs to be nuanced in the sense that there are things we can do to make the agency of people who are devastated by globalization more visible. Even to do just that would really completely change a lot of different things; in particular, the Eurocentrism of this discourse.

Alissa

Given the extent of feminist scholarship and activism addressing the ways in which gender is constitutive of globalisation, would you say that this

form of knowledge production has been factored into both mainstream and critical analyses of globalization? Has it affected how globalization is taught or researched, or has it emerged as a sub-specialty, gender and globalization, whereas the critical analysis of globalization is left untouched?

Chandra

I don't think that gender as a lens has become visible at all in the mainstream. The only way that gendered analyses of globalization become visible is when people are aware of the exploitation of, say, women workers in Nike factories. Otherwise, questions of gender continue to be sidelined. Most often, globalization is presented in a kind of non-gendered and non-classed language. Take the example of the IMF or the World Bank. When they talk about globalization, the language is about profit and accumulation rather than exploitation and poverty, or about the power or powerlessness of governments. These are all examples of a non-gendered analysis and an implicitly masculinist discourse.

What is made invisible through such a discourse is how processes of globalization have essentially re-colonized women's and girls' bodies and labours at different places and sites around the world. The fact is that women are invisible in the dominant discourses of policy making and the relations of rule that have to do with globalization.

What is also interesting, and somewhat surprising perhaps, is that in general the anti-globalization movement also does not include a feminist analysis. It's a movement comprised, it seems, of a loose coalition of groups, which includes some women's peace groups, women's environmental groups and that even has women in leadership positions, especially when students organize on campuses. Yet gender is not really present in thinking about anti-globalization and it's fascinating that it's not central to it.

Ena

Why do you think it's not central in critical work on globalization?

Chandra

One of my ideas is that in the places where we teach about gender, like in women's studies and maybe feminist departments, maybe we have not really

addressed the issues or come up with an anti-capitalist/anti-globalization critique. I think some of the students are not learning this, or rather, these are not the sites where they are getting this knowledge [of anti-globalization] from. They are getting it from new Marxist critiques, and some are getting it from environmental movements, but the more or less purist left thinkers that people draw on to really mobilize anti-globalization movements are not people who pay attention to gender.

Interestingly enough, "gender and globalization," as a central intellectual and political nexus, has not entered into the interdisciplinary space of women's studies. Gender and globalization is a growing area of research and perhaps teaching, but it seems pretty contained among a small group of scholars and the discussion is quite specialised. So analyses of globalization have not made their way into mainstream feminist research in the way that this work needs to. This goes back to the point I made in my talk in Toronto, which is that I think that the kind of transnational feminist framework we need to be building now has to be an explicitly anti-capitalist one. One that names forms of capitalism, examines the connection between those and the creation of subjectivity and identities and traces patterns of resistance around that. It seems to me that in order to actually be relevant to the current moment within women's studies, we need to be doing this work.

This is political work within women's studies: developing this kind of analysis and figuring out ways in which we can become much more visible political actors in the social movements, which, by the way, seem to attract people who would call themselves feminist, but the movements themselves don't necessarily include a feminist agenda. And if gender isn't made visible, if it isn't an important critical lens in these movements, then it's almost like there's a latent masculinism which just keeps reproducing itself.

Alissa

In your article in *Feminist Genealogies* you speak about possibilities of the category of work to enable feminist transnational politics by providing a point of departure for constructing disobedient female subjectivities and possible coalitions. I want to explore why production seems to be the key for you. Are you suggesting that this is the only "line of

strategy"?

Chandra

Well, I'm not sure that production is the only site, or that I would situate it in this way, but I think it is one of the key sites. One of the most visible ways to actually see how exploitation and profit and accumulation really function is to study how work is organised globally. I am not saying that this moment is that different from all earlier moments in capitalist development. There is a lot of continuity in the development of capitalism and right now it's just exacerbated and it takes different forms, and it moves in different ways and it's dispersed in different ways, and so on. However, it honestly seems to me right now that this is one of the sites in which you can identify forms of exploitation, make them visible and then organize globally around workers' identities.

Ena

How do you see your argument as similar or different from earlier left strategies?

Chandra

I think it is continuous with earlier analyses of the importance of organising labour within unions as well as across national borders. It's different, however, in that I really want to shift the theoretical understanding of work and the category of worker to take into account how both categories are inflected by not just class, but race and gender as well. This is crucial for understanding both work and workers, because through this we can start thinking about coalitions and solidarity in ways that address earlier problems of racial exclusion and masculinism in the history of labour organizing. So it's continuous with earlier left strategies, but I think that I try to bring in more of the complexity of the identity of the workers.

What I am trying to do is examine the connections between how globalization is gendered and racialised, and how local cultures and other kinds of divisions are utilized to position women's bodies and labour in very particular ways within those sites. In essence, how this work, which has women at its centre, forms the basis of the global economy.

Alissa

You mentioned that production is not the only site. Can you talk about some of the other sites you see as important?

Chandra

One good example would be reproductive rights, which centre around women's bodily integrity and autonomy. The ways in which reproduction works across national boundaries now is a very important site for transnational feminist connections. Organizing around questions of fertility and infertility get cast in very different ways, depending on whether you are in the north or south, or what kinds of privilege you have.

The patriarchal familial context, especially within religious fundamentalist communities, is another really important site for thinking about feminism and how to make connections. One of the more interesting things is the challenge of religious fundamentalism in almost all contexts, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Christian. We're talking about serious forms of control of various kinds that get written on the bodies of women; religion does this, nations do this, because women still are the bearers of culture in many ways and so these sites seem to be really important places to do some thinking. Religion is not an area that we as feminists have really taken on in this way, we haven't figured out how to address women who are part of these networks and where to offer alternatives. How does one address religion as a site that seems to be colonizing women on the one hand and mobilizing women on the other? In fact feminists in India are doing some excellent work in this area. We need a lot of thinking around this. The forms of religion and spirituality feminists have developed in the first world/North, seem to be apart from engaging with these questions.

SEPTEMBER 11TH

Ena

What is on many of our minds today is the challenges that the events of September 11 and its aftermath have posed to transnational feminist organising. It raises the need to understand how gender, as well as nationalism, have framed the events.

Chandra

What I have been thinking is, where are the women in this, where are some of the places that women appear in the discursive construction of the September 11th events. I am struck by the ways in which certain dominant representations of gender have led North Americans to feel loyal to this war.

Women have clearly been visible in much of this. The best example perhaps is Condoleeza Rice, who is speaking for a war game in which women really have no stake. Yet she is not the only woman who is visible. We know that there were American women who died on 9/11. We know that there are many women who have been widowed. So one set of images that we have been given is of American women as victims, as losing lives, widowed and mourning. It is reminiscent of the old colonial scenario about white men saving white women from brown men.

We are also seeing women as representatives of the war, as fighter pilots for example. The message is twofold. First, look how progressive we are. But it is also look, women are willing to die for our country as well. One of the most interesting women in this is Condoleeza Rice. She is extremely visible and she is also portrayed as having power, even though she does not appear on television a lot. In all of this, her gender and race are supposed to be irrelevant. What she is, what she stands for, is the American nation. A very interesting spokesperson for the US "motherland."

This representation of women is perfect, actually, for creating consensus for the war machinery. We either see women as loyal participants in the war, or we see women as victims, which allows us to see Americans as basically victims. Such representations of victimization have affected our ability to ask searching questions about the ways in which American foreign policy helped create Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban.

And then, of course, there are other women who are visible. These are "Arab and Muslim" women in the US, as well as Afghani and Pakistani women. Ironically the visibility of these women has also created a seeming consensus for the war. For example, we have this discussion about how the Imams at the mosque were asking women to take off their veils and cover their heads with caps and hats that had American logos. What's interesting here is that when American Arab and Muslim

women have been visible, the hijab is used to displace them from the national space. On rare occasions (and never on mainstream media) we get to hear the voices of American Muslim women who challenge this rabid nationalism. For example, the number of women who have pointed out that while they have been made to feel like foreigners, they are American.

On the other side you have the Afghani women. Suddenly the US has become the great champions of Afghani women. This is also part of the old colonial scenario. White men saving brown women from brown men. What is forgotten in this are the Islamic and Afghani women who have been drawing attention to their plight under the Taliban for some time: who have, in fact, been taking on precisely these patriarchal misogynist forms of abuse and control of women. In order for the old colonial scenario to work, the Revolutionary Afghanistan Women's Association, and the many feminists from all over the Islamic world, have to be erased.

But I guess this is what complicates a feminist response to Sept 11th. On the one hand it is true that Afghani women and Pakistani women living under fundamentalist regimes face really terrible abuse and very restricted everyday conditions of life. And so, it is important to have a clear criticism of the Taliban. But this criticism has to be contextualised. We need to understand the conditions that have led to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. We need to understand that it was Western powers that led to the Taliban coming to power. At the same time, we need to contextualise religious fundamentalism. There is an automatic tendency to identify Afghanistan and other Islamic countries as misogynist, to see them as stuck in some medieval patriarchal time warp compared with the West. We need to challenge this picture. After all, we live with our own patriarchies and misogynies in the USA and Canada!

So what I think is important is really to pay attention to how, in the West, representations of gender have been central in this war. This strategy ties into other forms of control, of global capitalism and racism. This has implications not just for women in Afghanistan, but also women in the West. Sept 11 has made it virtually impossible for any of us to stand outside all of this. The moment you do, you are disloyal, unpatriotic, un-American.

The result is that Sept 11 has intensified various forms of patriarchal control in both Afghanistan as well as in the West.

GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM

Alissa

In your public lecture in Toronto, you mentioned your involvement in grassroots activist groups located in both India and the United States. Many of us who have migrated from the South have attempted to do this in our own political work, with different degrees of success. We wonder if you could elaborate a bit on what this entails.

Chandra

There are three groups that I have been and am involved in. The first is Awareness, a group in Orissa, that is primarily peasant and tribal. The second is Grassroots Leadership, a group in North Carolina that basically came out of the civil rights movement and was organized mainly around questions of class and racial justice. It is primarily a group of African American and white organizers, and I ended up being the first non-black or non-white person on their board. More recently I have been connected with a newly formed women's studies program at Utkal University in Bhubaneswar. Because of the demands of childcare, in the past two years I haven't been as involved with the first two groups.

Ena

What are the kinds of work that these groups are engaged in?

Chandra

Reflecting on these groups, I realize that neither the organization in India nor the one in the US is defined as a feminist organization. Both were defined as organizations that had poor working class people at their centre. So that's interesting.

Awareness is a grassroots group made up of peasants and tribals. You know Orissa has almost the largest tribal population in India. It is also one of the poorest states. You can see very very clearly the effects of globalization, partly because of the multinationals that are moving in and essentially dispossessing tribal populations of their land, their way of life, their language, their culture. It is very

similar to the native American situation. There are groups working actively to challenge these things, which is very exciting.

Grassroots Leadership came out of the civil rights movement. It's been around now for about twenty years and their primary work was building the infrastructure of a social movement within the South, that was committed to social and economic justice for poor working people and people of colour. A lot of the work that this organization does is work with different communities around very particular issues to help people strategize, organize, mobilize. They facilitate learning around particular issues, but then they move out so that those communities essentially build their own organization. Many of these groups become the infrastructure of a larger movement. It's just been an incredible experience and actually it was my work with them that led me to my present concerns, because this group began working on a campaign against privatization about four or five years ago. Now they are doing really good work around the privatization of prisons.

And the Women's Studies programme at Utkal is new - less than five years old. But it has community organising, and community service at its center.

Alissa

Did you find that the groups in the South and North had similar or different priorities?

Chandra

Although one group was situated in Orissa and one was in North Carolina, the issues that they were dealing with were very similar, as were the analyses, the values and the strategies that each of the groups had.

The most exciting part for me, and where I think I was able to make the link with these groups and perhaps have played some part in helping to think through the issues and the organizing, had to do with political education.

A number of grassroots organizations employ strategies around mass mobilization, but they don't necessarily have a very complex notion of how political education and conscientization are central to mobilization. So when organizations focus on mobilization in reaction to particular injustices, they don't necessarily build on that

mobilization. If you win a battle, it stops there. On the other hand, if there is an agenda of political education, in which the organization has really gone through the stages of political education with the constituency that it is working with, then I think that there is a deep level impact. Often times it is empowering in the sense that people then act on their own behalf, so you don't then have the situation of the organizers going in from the outside, doing that work.

And for me, that was the exciting part of both of these groups, they both seemed to have that commitment to political education and that's something that has always interested me. It's not education the way the academy defines education, as you know.

In addition to a similar focus on political education and a similar way of thinking about organising, both organisations had an acute sense of how the local and the global connect for the issues around which you mobilize within very finite, local contexts. For example, at Grassroots we were organizing around the privatization of the service industry at the University of North Carolina and trying to make connections between all the layoffs and the resultant impoverishment of communities of colour and the effects of structural adjustment programmes on poor women in third world contexts.

Organising against globalization was also urgent in Orissa. It is one of those places where you can almost see what's going to happen in the rest of the world, because it is thrown into such stark relief. The government is not a strong advocate for the people at all, and it is a poor state, so that there is an assumption that all of these conglomerates can walk in and do whatever. It's almost as if the Indian government has sanctioned it. On the other hand, Orissa has a history of resistance and now there is incredible mobilization against globalization. It's one of the places where tribal people are organizing in a big way, to the extent that there is armed struggle in particular tribal communities. Women are also at the forefront of a lot of these tribal struggles. During my last visit in 2000, I met some incredible women who were grassroots organizers, doing this kind of work and also doing cultural and political education in their community.

So another similarity between the two groups was that they were very conscious of how

struggles against globalization are grounded in the life of people who live in those spaces, but at the same time they saw how it ties into larger global processes. They both worked to highlight the local in the global and the global in the local simultaneously. Both of the organizations I worked with have had the ability to do that. They had an analysis that made those connections, and to be able to offer it to people so that they could see themselves in those ways as well.

I facilitated exchanges between these two organizations. Organizers from Awareness came to the US and organizers from Grassroots went to India. It was quite exciting and then we realized that there really were a lot of things in common. The way the exchanges took place was that organizers came and met with the group here and were introduced to their work and their strategies. It was like a study tour. And vice versa. So two people would go from here to Orissa, at different times. They would stay for about a month each with the organizer, as well as going into the tribal areas and meet people.

Both of these groups also had a gender lens, even though the groups were not "women's groups," but made up equally of men and women. While gender was not necessarily ever the primary lens, it was important that it always surfaced. And this is also where a lot of the work that I did with Grassroots leadership in North Carolina came in. There was always an openness in the group to really pick through this in the same way as now there is an openness to think about gay and lesbian issues and organizing gay and lesbian communities in the South. So now there is a lot of coalition building with gay and lesbian organizations, youth groups, and a lot of different anti-privatization groups.

Recently, I have connected with a newly formed women's studies program at the University in Bhubaneswar. The person who runs it is fabulous, and she has solid ties to the grassroots women's community in Orissa. Through her I ended up meeting many women doing activist work. So there are a lot of possibilities and I just don't know how and when I can actually do this work, but what is exciting for me is building relationships with feminists who are within the academy. It's quite different, being in the academy, or being a public intellectual in India, in the sense that the academy does not necessarily constrain you in India, as it

does in the USA or Canada. In fact very often so much of the work that you do is outside the academy, so it does not constitute your primary identity. For most left programs and people in many other countries their identities are non-academic. What really needs to happen here is that people within the academy have to start thinking in ways that overflow the borders of the academy. We have to widen the lens that we use to do our work, otherwise it becomes a totally sealed, bounded situation in which we define all of our social justice work within the academy. It's important that this is not all there is.

Ena

Now was there any way in which the organisations you were involved in differed in how they made the connections between the global and the local?

Chandra

Well, in one way the difference was an obvious one, which is that within the US, questions of nationality don't really come up (of course, September 11th may have changed this). So, for example, even though poor black people see their disenfranchisement, there is often this construct of what it means to be an American that isn't taken apart. That becomes a point of tension sometimes. In the Awareness group, on the other hand, there was a very clear analysis of what it meant to be Indian and poor and a tribal within India, to be disenfranchised in that way, and what all that meant in relation to the west, so those discussions were always visible. That was one of the differences. This came up in our exchange. When people from India came to visit us, they seemed to know a lot more about the US. They certainly know a lot about cultural stuff, they watch tv, but it's not just that. They seem to have a very well formed political critique of the US and its history of inequality and exploitation. This is not as true of people who went from here to there. What is interesting to me is that it tells us something of what it means to be American.

Alissa

This is an important issue that often comes up in organizing across borders. Moving towards transnational organising really requires working through differences of national location and the

kind of power relations that stem from where we are located. What kind of work do you see as necessary to reconcile this tension?

Chandra

For a start, what is needed is more political education. In fact, working through differences in national location became one of the learnings in the exchange. I am not sure I can say too much about it, because I wasn't present at the time. My sense of its effects had more to do with the way the organizers who had these experiences were able to reflect on them and then include them in their work at home.

However, this kind of political education is difficult to carry out because it requires long term connections between groups, which in turn requires money. We're not talking about organizations that have lots of money. So the money required to get people to go from one place to the other, across the world, is not a priority. We need to address the fact that groups in the North and the South don't have the same kind of power to define transnational organising. Those in the South often don't have the same power to publish, or the same power to have their analysis taken forward into a global forum. We need to address some of these differences more, to make them visible and to think seriously about strategies to address them; not pretend that they don't exist or that there are only personality differences, which is what people, especially those with more power, tend to do.

What is crucial is that we deal with our own sense of national identity and what comes with that. Another project that I am hoping to embark on pretty soon is to work with some colleagues to write an introductory text which really talks about the importance of nation for the formation of feminist thinking. The nation as a category is so crucial now and one of the assumptions is that because capital moves across borders nations don't matter anymore, which is not true at all.

What we need to do is to start thinking seriously, and in very holistic and layered ways, about the people that we are working with across borders. That learning process should become an important part of organizing. Learning about difference and learning about power from within is as important as constructing a strategy and agenda for struggle. I think that's really a central part of political education. It's not just education, about

how it works in the outside world and its consequences in your life. It's also about how you participate in relationships. That is one of the things that Grassroots Leadership would really implement and they are very good at that. Anyway, the lack of political education is one of the reasons that we don't do so well working across differences and borders, simply because we move quickly and glibly from the differences to the similarity of purpose.

GLOBALIZATION, ACTIVISM AND THE ACADEMY

Ena

We wanted to talk to you about something you referred to earlier in your discussions about the groups you were involved in, namely activism and the academy. I think this comes from the positions that we struggle with, and that is how we bridge the gap between the academy and activism. So we're wondering if you could talk a bit what you see as some of the ways the academy poses limits and what you feel are some important strategies for overcoming those kinds of constraints.

Chandra

I think that the major thing for me - and which I think is crucial for really doing this work - is always to allow your own thinking about the academy to overflow the walls of the academy; always to be always conscious of the extent to which your understanding of the academy or the university governs what you are doing, and that includes the scholarship, the teaching, the institutional work. And then to actively think outside that.

So for instance, will people outside the academy be able to read what I am writing? Who are these people? That does not necessarily mean that one must only do "non-academic" writing, it just means that you're addressing questions that have to be clearly of interest outside a specialised audience. One should address not just academic questions or disciplinary questions, (which are interesting but then remain within the borders of those disciplines), but rather larger questions of social transformation. So that's the first thing: to ensure that one's thinking and one's practices don't remain fenced in.

The other thing is to think consciously

about making not only our work in the academy, but also the academy itself accountable to larger questions of social justice. In other words, to try to work (maybe as a critical mass working together) on really understanding how the academy produces certain kinds of citizens; and how that understanding of citizenship is so crucial to the larger question of citizenship within the nation state or within the world in general. This should become a visible part of the work that one does. There are people situated within the field of education who try to do some of these things, even though the discipline of education is very traditional and often closes down these questions rather than opening them up. My sense, though, is that there are certain spaces in the Canadian academy where there are people who do this work. I have learned quite a bit from that. In fact some of the work on education and globalization is coming out of Canada, not the US, and that is very exciting.

At a personal level, I really had to step outside the academy into intellectual and organizing spaces that were not academic spaces, in order to re-enter and really think about what I was doing. It was my work with the grassroots organizations that pushed me to think in more concrete ways about the work I was doing within the academy. Some of this thinking really would not have happened if I had stayed within the boundaries of the academy, because of course the academy works by mystifying all of these things for those of us who are in there. I would have experienced alienation, I would have experienced disenfranchisement, which of course I have in different ways, in different places, but I'm not sure I would have actually started to analyze the institution in the way that I'm doing now, if I had not stepped outside it. You see this is the thing about privilege, this is why I say that I don't know if I could have seen this if I had remained within. The privilege that one has being in the academy is the privilege not to see certain things. And the fact of this privilege becomes invisible to us in the academy.

This does not mean that it is easy to bridge the gap between the academy and activism. A lot of feminists I know, and a lot of feminists of colour that I know, raise serious questions about whether the academy is the right place for them. It is not that I haven't faced those questions or that I don't think about them. I think about them, but I also think

about what I'm good at, what I feel I have learned over the years in the everyday work that I have done within academic settings, and how important that is as well. Even though I have often felt alienated from the academy, I have never tried to look for a job elsewhere. I have never made that move, partly because I feel that the academy provides both a very contradictory and productive base for thinking about fundamental issues of democracy, social justice and citizenship. At one level it is an institutional structure that is a part of capitalist relations of rule within the nation state as well as internationally.

Therefore, it is really important that we think about exactly what is happening with the academy now, because very concrete changes are taking place and have been taking place for the last twenty years or so. Even though that is still going on, I still think that the academy is one of the very few places that provides a space for imagining opposition, for producing multiple subjectivities that are capable of critical thinking and resistant action against the institution itself. I really do believe that educational spaces, especially higher educational spaces, are important spaces for that kind of activist work, such as mobilizing resistance. If you think about where social movements come from, student organizing has been absolutely fundamental to many, many moments of revolution and changes that have taken place in cultures all over the world. You know it's one of those things I never want to forget, because if you forget that, then you can become totally cynical about the academy.

Alissa

You mentioned that you know a number of feminists and especially women of colour, who feel that they want to leave the academy. I wonder if you could comment about the difficulties of integrating anti-racist feminist activism in the academy.

Chandra

The academy has always been hostile to feminists of colour and I am now talking specifically about feminists who have radical politics. There is a long history of feminists of colour having difficulty even finishing PhDs, in the American academy. I can count women on the fingers of my two hands who are very important in the feminist movement in the

United States, but who had difficulty finishing their PhDs in the academy, because it is a white supremacist masculinist academy. My own experience of going through a PhD program is very similar. So that's one level.

Then another level is the fact that for women of colour and especially feminists of colour academic jobs are more like a revolving door in the United States. So many of us get temporary jobs. We're often invited to these very prestigious visiting positions and sometimes there is a name attached to the position. That doesn't mean a whole lot, just that that person funded it or something. The moment that the two or three years are up, then out you go. I don't know any case in which it has turned out to be a permanent position. So there's a long history of a revolving door for women of colour and feminists of colour and even white women feminists who are political in certain ways, or whose politics are not accommodationist.

Then there is another history of the denial of tenure. There is the assumption that the work you do is trivial or political or community oriented, none of which the academy rewards. So the academy is basically hostile to feminists of colour. Many of us go through day-to-day struggles to establish a voice, to establish a community, to do the work we want to do, without any sense that it is appreciated or supported. Because of all of these things I think many people have just decided it's not worth the struggle. With the increasing corporatization of the academy in the US, it becomes less and less clear whether the work that you are doing in places like African studies, women's studies or gay and lesbian studies, is seen as resistance of any kind. If you were tokenized to the extent that you happen to be the only person, or one of four people on a large campus doing this work, you ask yourself, is this worth it, is this the kind of impact I want to have or could I be of better service in a different place. I think that those issues are very particular to women of colour.

There are also other tensions in terms of how the academy in the US plays off immigrant women of colour against US born women of colour. Then there are our own misunderstandings within our own community, where on the one hand we have embraced each other because obviously we do have experiences in common. Whether you're immigrant or whether you're US born, you do have

certain experiences in common in the academy if you share radical politics and if you're anti-racist. On the other hand, we've often gone from that sense of camaraderie to thinking too quickly or too easily about being in solidarity without necessarily having done the work on each other's differences, on each other's histories, on what potentially divides our communities.

Another piece of this is our relationships with white feminists, which is profoundly important in the academy, because you know whatever ground feminists have covered in the academy has been largely ground that white feminists have covered. This is not to say that I think there is some homogeneous notion of white feminism, or about how white feminists behave or act, but unfortunately, speaking now from my own location in women's studies in the US, I believe that US women's studies programmes have not de-colonized themselves in terms of racism and imperialism.

TRANSNATIONALISING WOMEN'S STUDIES

Ena

What do you see as a major pedagogical challenge that faces women's studies in a globalized era? Here in Canada, often because of the position of Canada, especially vis-à-vis the United States, but also Britain, there is a nationalism in women's studies programs and so one of the things that we wanted to start thinking about was the challenges of keeping women's studies abreast of the kind of challenges brought out by transnational politics.

Chandra

I think that this is a really important question and it's actually precisely what I have been trying to take apart in the last few years, because I think over the last five or so, there's been a big push within the US to internationalize women's studies.

What's interesting about this is that if you think about where the push to internationalize has originally come from in the US academy, it has been from the Federal government. And that had to do with the formation of area studies programs, where originally the funding was tied to US imperialism. For instance, the first area studies program in the United States was Russian studies. What is more recent is that it is not just the Federal

government but the corporate world that is also pushing to internationalize curricula, because, of course, we have to understand everybody else around the world better so we can trade with them. There are more corporate alliances now, in the sense that there is a lot of funding from different corporations for chaired professorships, for sports teams, for scientific research, etc. This is one of the ways that the academy is shifting.

What is interesting is that when women's studies programmes have internationalised, the funding has often come from foundations which have funded three to five year grants in different universities in the US for bringing area studies and women's studies together. For example the Ford Foundation has done this. Ford is an interesting organization in that it has had many feminists who have been at its helm for a long time.

While such funding has led to the internationalisation of the curricula, it has often done so in very problematic ways. This is actually part of what I have been writing and thinking about recently. I do agree with Ella Shohat¹ about the nationalism of women's studies. In fact, one of the things that I've been trying to discuss with women's studies faculty is the totally untaught notion of the United States of America within this supposedly globalized curriculum. This new curriculum has become another way of shoring up the nationalism of the US.

We've moved quite a bit in the last ten years to become more proficient at addressing the relationships of race, class and gender, but nation is omitted, especially in pedagogical work. This is another interesting phenomenon, the fact that the scholarly research is often just ahead of the pedagogical work. It makes me ask the question, how valid is that scholarly work to our everyday practices? When "nation" appears within women's studies pedagogy, it does so in reference to "other" places, so if you are teaching about Africa, or a particular country, then nation as a category becomes important, because you're teaching about different societies. Rarely does the US appear as a category in such discussions, and in my opinion one of the main challenges of thinking transnationally is that you have to start thinking about yourself in the same kinds of terms as you think about everybody else. Part of the privilege of Eurocentric, Americacentric women's studies, is never having to

look at one's national privilege. So I think that's one of the places that there needs to be a lot of work.

I have started to look at the different ways in which women's studies is internationalizing in the book I am working on now. I've identified about three frameworks. Embedded in each are alternative pedagogies of anti-globalization, alternative ways in which women's studies links the local and the global. What I've been trying to do is to sort through these models, to figure out what relationships get set up between students and teachers among different communities. What are the relations of power that work here and what kinds of notions of sameness and difference are set up?

Very briefly, the first is what I call a "feminist as tourist" model. This is where women's studies courses "add women from other countries" into existing frameworks. The second is the "feminist as explorer" model. Here one would often find very detailed and complicated courses that are added to the curriculum, entire courses which would be on women in the third world, or women in Africa, or women in India or something like that. Yet they don't necessarily make a difference in the framework of the larger curricula, as the central courses still end up being centred around US or Eurocentric experiences. American studies for instance, is never included within area studies. America is not an area, but everywhere else is! And no connections are made between the projects of area studies and race and ethnic studies. So in other words, a women's studies department or programme can essentially claim to be international by adding courses about people all over the world, without seriously addressing those issues, like racism, that have been uncomfortable over the past ten years. I think this is really terrible. For example, you can avoid paying attention to the ways in which racialization or heterosexualization was constitutive in forming the US nation state.

Finally, the third model is what I refer to as a feminist solidarity model, which is really about bringing the transnational and the national in very close dialogue with each other. It also involves teaching comparatively, especially about how the local and the global are simultaneously present in all contexts. This necessitates radically revisioning how the entire curriculum works and how the courses relate to each other. It means that the US or Canada is no longer the centre of the curriculum,

where everybody else gets added on. It means re-thinking the curriculum and the pedagogy in a deeply de-centered and comparative way. Such a de-centred approach does not mean that local questions cannot be asked and taught, but that this is placed in the context of issues of power and the social construction of sameness and difference.

Obviously the time to do it is now. In fact most programs are not only moving to internationalize the curriculum, but if you look at job descriptions now for women's studies, they are hiring faculty who work on transnational feminism.

So we're canonizing, or we're legitimizing, this particular space in terms of scholarship and activism and now we're also doing that in terms of the curriculum. Whether we have thought through precisely what this involves, what the politics of knowledge are that are involved in creating a transnational pedagogy and curriculum in women's studies, is a different question. And I think a lot of energy needs to go in here.

ENDNOTE

1. Ella Shohat. "Area Studies, Transnationalism, and the Feminist Production of Knowledge," *Signs* 26.4 (Summer 2001): 1269-72.

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