Gender Theory as Southern Theory

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Abstract

This chapter explores the global connections to theorising gender. The chapter argues that the global north clearly maintains hegemony in the production of gender and feminist theory in the world. The theories produced in the global south are generally oriented to theories and methods developed in the global north. There is a rich but unacknowledged archive of accounts and analyses of gender from around the global south. A survey of gender scholarship in the global south shows important foundation for decolonial thinking about gender theory. We contend that gender needs to be understood in a historical context of the majority world including colonization, colonial violence, role of the postcolonial state, land acquisition, global hunger and post-independence globalization. Feminism in the north as well feminism around the global south stands to gain from the vision of a wider world. Gender scholarship, therefore, needs to move to a world-centered, solidarity-based approach to knowledge.

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1 Introduction

Why and how are the stereotypes of 'other' women so integral to white western women's construction of themselves? asks the Australian sociologist Chilla Bulbeck in her book *Re-orienting Western Feminisms*. In this book she indicts the whiteness of the dominant forms of feminist thought on a global level. A similar case has been made by women of colour within the global North. In a well-known argument, Hooks (1984) and Collins (1997) observed that feminism constructed from a position of racial privilege was profoundly limited in its grasp of women's experience and its understanding of social inequality. Around the same time, postcolonial feminists like Lazreg (1990), Mohanty (1991) and Spivak (1988) identified the colonial gaze of a feminism that painted 'third world women' in a monochrome of victimhood and otherness. Building on these contributions and on the encounters of international feminists at the UN world conferences on women, Bulbeck argued that it is time to decenter the global north as the privileged producer of knowledge, and shift the focus to the postcolonial world—where majority of the world's people live.

This is more than an academic matter for feminists in the global north. Donald Trump's election as the US President by a white majority electorate, following a campaign striking for its bigotry and fear-mongering, shows the

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continuing power of racial hierarchies. The current shattering of northern democratic aspirations for a just society, in Europe as well as the USA, throws into relief the exclusion of ideas, as well as populations, from the south. For those societies despised as backward or unworthy of inclusion have a rich discourse for understanding social injustices on a local and a global level.

In this chapter we explore global relationships in theorising gender. We discuss the marginalization of gender theory from the global south, and the persisting hegemony of the global north, in the world knowledge economy. We argue that, like much of the knowledge produced in the north, mainstream feminist thought has been harmed by its own colonial privilege. We show how there are rich and consequential gender theories that come from the global south. Therefore we argue for a world-centered, rather than northern-centred, approach to studying gender.

We first examine the persistent hegemony of the north in the global economy of knowledge. We then take a walk through some of the gender research and debate that comes from the global periphery, about gender-based violence of colonialism, gender and the postcolonial state, control of land, migration and transnational gender regimes, and gender and global hunger. We then discuss how to conceptualize postcolonial perspectives on gender, and the new shape that feminist thought might take at a global level.

2 Gender Theory: Hegemony of the North

There is a structural imbalance in the global economy of knowledge. Theory and research produced and published in the north is carefully studied and cited by scholars in the south. The reverse rarely happens. Most journals, and practically all the 'top' journals, are housed in the north, so that is where research-based knowledge is validated. This inequality involves a division of labour. As the Beninese philosopher Hountondji (1997, 2002) has pointed out, the colonised and postcolonial world serves the global economy of knowledge mainly as a source of raw materials, i.e. data; while theory, methodology, databanks, and paradigms of teaching, are mainly produced in the north.

Scholars in the south are under tremendous pressure to publish in northern journals or to present in expensive conferences held in the north if they are to achieve recognition on a global scale. Hountondji (2002) calls this presence of northern perspectives within the lives and works of southern scholars 'extraversion'—being oriented to authority from outside one's own society, and specifically, to the colonizing power.

The observation applies to gender studies. Most gender theories and feminist research paradigms circulating around the world are developed in the global north. Research on surrogate mothers in India, or maquiladoras (export factory) workers in Mexico, or sex workers in Vietnam, or gender violence in sub-Saharan Africa, or gender and sexuality in China, done in the global south by feminist researchers based there, nevertheless owe their framing ideas to the familiar classics of northern theory.

For instance, in her insightful study of the Maquiladora workers in Mexico, Salzinger (2003), while redefining femininity in the context of Maquiladoras to mean "docile, dexterous and cheap labor", still borrows the basis for understanding femininities and masculinities from the gender literature of the global north. Studies on globalization and gender coming out of India still rely on Giddens, Marx, Harvey, Butler and Kristeva for theorization (Bose, 2008). The poignant work on *vestidas,* feminized male sex workers, in Puebla, Mexico, interprets the gendered violence faced by the sex workers through Marx's political-economic lens and Agamben's philosophy of limits of violence (Carreras, 2009). There are countless other examples.

The problem is not that these writings erase local histories or social context. What extraverted writings suffer from is a reductive epistemology, where the southern context is reduced to a case study, providing data that reaffirms or modifies a northern conceptualization.

In recent years, many feminist scholars have tried to move beyond a Euro-American-centric

approach to gender research. There is now interest in multiple perspectives, in the knowledge implications of cultural pluralism, and in breaking down north-south binaries. Northern journals have been publishing special issues with contributions from different parts of the global south, ranging from south Asia, East Asia and Africa to Latin America. We might almost say that global diversity of knowledge has been genre-ized as a field of feminism.

These efforts represent real progress. Yet in themselves they do not decenter the north. The framing of these efforts still derives from the historical experience of the imperial centre; this experience, and the institutional privilege deriving from it, is still at the root of feminist knowledge-making, still reflected in the meaning and usage of fundamental concepts such as 'gender', 'patriarchy', 'sexuality', 'normativity', 'masculinities and femininities'. As the Australian Aboriginal scholar Moreton-Robinson (2000) shows, racial and institutional privilege is built into mainstream forms of feminism, even when well-meaning towards indigenous people. Moreton-Robinson argues that even the anti-racist white, middle-class feminist academics, in their attempts to speak on behalf of indigenous women and the oppression they experienced, used their position of dominance to inadvertently silence the Indigenous women academics' voices to represent an indigenous standpoint.

We argue that the first step toward correcting this persisting imbalance in gender knowledge is to get beyond the idea of *diversity* and acknowledge in their entirety the structural *inequalities* in the global economy of knowledge and the depth of the hegemony of the metropole. Second—and more important—we must recognize that the periphery is not just a data mine. Colonized and postcolonial societies also produce theories of gender, and these are deep and important (Connell, 2014). New horizons of feminist theory open when we look persistently beyond the mainstream circuits.

3 Gender Issues in the Majority World

Feminist and gender scholars working in the global south, in the presence of different histories and cultural traditions from those of the imperial centre, are likely to emphasise different social experiences when thinking about gender. They are likely to be aware of the violent histories of colonialism and the new forms of imperialism. We will introduce four themes that are prominent in gender literatures from the South: the psychological and social analysis of colonial gender violence; the gender trajectories of the postcolonial state and the neoliberal globalized world; gendered contestation over land; and the gendered politics of hunger.

Violence. Feminist thought about gender-based violence has tended to ignore the violence of colonialism. Gender researchers in the south have pushed back, emphasising that colonization was itself a massive form of gender violence. Conquest was often accompanied by mass rape, and colonized women remained as targets of the colonizers' sexuality.

This had consequences for colonized men as well as women. In his psychological analysis of racism in metropolitan France and in the French empire, Fanon (1952) argued that under colonialism, a system of violence and economic exploitation, black masculinity became disturbed as it struggled to find a place in a colonial dispensation that defined it as biologically inferior and made Black men the objects of anxiety or fear. Writing on similar themes some decades later, the Indian psychologist Nandy (1983) showed how colonialism produced narrowed and power-oriented masculinities, among both colonizers and colonized. Nandy distinguishes between colonization through military conquest and colonization of the mind (1983: XI). Military conquest presents a hyper-masculinized projection of the colonizer and the colonization of the mind is complete when the cognitive connection

between the British political and military dominance and the traditional dominance within the Western culture of the masculine over the feminine had been made. This masculine trope is then adjusted to the Indian culture and context to establish a new and narrow kind of conquest oriented masculinity.

In a more socially grounded analysis, Amina Mama (1997, 2005) makes a strong argument for understanding violence against women in postcolonial Africa in terms of the violence of colonialism. She shows how patriarchal dynamics at the imperial source constructed abjected positions for colonized women: the 'pedestalization of the upper-class, white womanhood was counterpoised to an inferiorized construction of blackness' (Mama, 1997: 48). This normalized the violence on black women during colonialism and after notional decolonization. In the same vein, Puri (2012) argues that legal violence against queer sexuality in India is a colonial inheritance —like other features of the gender order such as the legalization of marital rape. She argues that the intersections of race, class, religious and sexual difference are built into the legal rule that criminalizes the 'act of sodomy', preserving into postcolonial time the power hierarchies of the colonial social order.

States. In the struggle for independence, and then in the making of post-colonial trajectories, postcolonial states developed their own gender orders, partly inherited from the colonial gender order and partly newly-made. Postcolonial dictatorships in Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia and in other regions established new configurations of masculinized power. Even in electoral democracies such as India, the state assumed a masculinized dispensation as it struggled with the consolidation of its diverse populations, which had been fragmented and divided under colonial rule.

Many local authors writing in vernaculars have dealt with these complexities. Mahashewta Devi's literary works, written in the Bengali vernacular about the 'gendered subaltern subject' (Spivak, 1989, p. 106), call attention to the oppression of the indigenous people of India by both the colonial and postcolonial state. In her stories, particularly about indigenous women and the state's unfettered control over their personhood and bodies, Devi does not deny her protagonists their subjectivities. In asserting their subaltern subjectivities, she raises questions about the blurry lines between 'empire' and 'nation'—the nation-state built in the image of the metropole. Devi's writings, meant for a local instead of a global audience, have inspired a generation of Indian feminist scholarship. Coming from one of the foremost intellectual, upper-caste (though not affluent) families in India, Devi saw her writings translated into English, by Spivak among others, for an international audience. Yet her work is rarely mentioned in the mainstream gender studies curriculum in the global north.

The development strategy of industrialization in the global periphery created new economic niches that were sites of privilege for men, such as the tech industry in India (Banerjee, 2006; Aneesh, 2006; Biao, 2007), the oil-funded industries of Algeria (Lazreg, 1990), or the motor industry in Australia. Yet development strategies did not only privilege men and boys; they often included considerable investment in girls' education (Lazreg, 1990). Mernissi (1985 [1975]) notes ironically that in Morocco, the developmentalist state itself became the main threat to men's supremacy. Southern scholars and writers do not paint a monolithic picture of gender oppression in these countries. All of Devi's women characters are rebels whose very existence creates subversive discourse and practice.

Present-day neoliberal globalization is still fraught with the effects of coloniality in its constitution of gender. It has produced new masculinized elites in global power centres (Connell, 2016) and has re-constituted, rather than abolished, the coloniality of gender. New forms of dependency and marginalization are illustrated by Banerjee's (2012) research on the U.S. visa regime and its imprints on the gendered and racialized lives of 'highly skilled' Indian families who migrate to the U.S. for work. The study is based on two family forms—male-led Indian immigrant families of high-tech workers and female-led Indian immigrant families of nurses. The "highly-skilled" workers migrate for employment on skilled workers' visas and their

spouses migrate on what is popularly known as dependent visas. The dependent visa disallows the spouses of skilled workers to engage in legal employment in the United States for a term that could be as long as twenty years. One of the outcomes of this policy is that highly qualified women who are spouses of the high-tech workers, most of whom were working before migration, were forced to adapt to the performance of being "housewives". In contrast, the comparatively less qualified husbands of the nurses, who were used to being the unquestioned heads of the household prior to migration, were now relegated to a dependent position. This reorganization of the family structure due to visa policies that disproportionately affects Indian immigrants in the U.S., led to various kinds of shifts and reassertions of power and dependence.

Banerjee shows how visa regimes reconfigure identities and notions of the self for visa holders, impose constraints on relationships, and redefine gender dynamics within families. She argues that the apparently gender-neutral visa policies of the United States take on heavily gendered meanings when translated into everyday interactions in the families bound by such policies. Digging out the gender and racial presuppositions of visa laws, she shows empirically that visa structures of the state create a web of dependence for migrant subjects. The visa regime, then, is embedded in a new coloniality of gender that controls the racialized masculinities of a technocratic labor-force and their families as they enter the capitalist project of gendered global mobility.

Land. The issue of land has been almost completely absent from social theory produced in the global north. Yet forcible acquisition of land was at the core of colonization, both in settler colonies and colonies of rule. Relationship to land was central to how colonized societies formulated their social (including gender), cultural, environmental and metaphorical relationships and knowledge—and it remains vital.

Bina Agarwal, a feminist economist from India whose life's work has illuminated the relationship between gender and land, provides a clear and multi-dimensional account of how gender relationships work in agricultural societies—home to half of the world's population and the majority of the poor (Agarwal, 1994, 2000, 2010). Her research links poverty, local politics, household negotiations, gendered division of labor, women's networks and activism, governmental policies and strategies and changing technologies in agriculture and forestry. Agarwal (2010) analyzes how women's rights to familial land and property—or the denial thereof—in rural South Asia produce complex negotiations and bargaining within four 'arenas'—the household, the market, the community at large and the State. She argues, "Gender relations get constituted and contested within each" (p. 36). One of the ways she demonstrates the interrelatedness of these structural forces in constituting gender relationality is through the example of contemporary poor rural households in Bangladesh. She argues that the State push toward Islamization of the society, with support from local communities, has curtailed certain economic rights of women in Bangladesh. But poor rural women are challenging these strictures collectively, with support from NGOs, and often with support from their husbands because these new religious norms impinge upon the livelihood of the families. This is one of many examples from Agarwal's work that shows the connectedness between social and political organization in constituting gender. Agarwal's work is, perhaps, the fullest contemporary demonstration, anywhere in the world, of the multidimensional and dynamic character of gender relations.

Agarwal is not alone in her concern with issues about land. Arundhati Rai (1999) and Mahashweta Devi in their non-fictional and fictional writing respectively, have also shown the fraught relationship between land usurpation, gender and violence in the hinterlands of India. In settler-colonial contexts, land and land rights has been central to indigenous people's politics, and the issue always has a gender dimension. For instance, in an important collection of Aboriginal writings in Australia called *Our Land is Our Life,* Langton (1997) argues that in the face of colonial violence, women's system of law and older women's ties to place were crucial to community survival.

Hunger. Like the issue of land, hunger and its gender politics have also been undertheorized in gender scholarship in the north. But this is an inescapable issue in the global south. Hunger in the colonial and postcolonial world drives migration; it polarizes the urban and the rural, the global north and the south; and hunger too has a gendered profile. Where colonizers seize the most productive land, they destroy the food sources on which indigenous peoples rely; this was one of the mechanisms of death on the frontier in North America and Australia. Since colonial states are always authoritarian, they can ignore famine when it suits them; this was a mechanism of mass death in British-ruled India, especially in Bengal.

In a new collection of studies on the politics and aesthetics of hunger, contributors examine the intense hunger experienced by the dying millions in the Bengal famine of 1943, the Native American populations in the United States, African children caught in the war of Biafra, and the Egyptian poor involved in the bread revolts of 1977 (Ulanowicz and Basu, 2017).

In the afterword of the book *The Politics and Aesthetics of Global Hunger*, Banerjee and Ray (2017) argue that the liberal discourse of 'freedom from hunger' as a civil right becomes tenuous for those on the fringes, those marginalized by gender, race, class, and sexuality oppressions, both in the former colonies and in the metropole. The trauma of colonial hunger in the 'other lands' remains in local memory; yet the imagery of hunger in global media is of something less than human.

Hunger as political performance of protest is also a gendered phenomenon. Historically the 'hunger strike' as a form of protest against the imperial state was led by men, for instance activists in the Irish independence movement who had been imprisoned. It was picked up by women's suffrage campaigners in the metropole. In recent times there has been a resurgence of women's use of the hunger strike, protesting postcolonial states and their unbridled power over the most marginalized: Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, Irom Chanu Sharmila and Medha Patkar in India, Theresa Spence, the former chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation in Canada, among many others. One response is a display of state power over women's bodies through medicalized force-feeding to undermine their resistance.

The issues of violence, state, land and hunger call for the re-thinking of gender in the world, including the metropole. The colonial and postcolonial worlds hold a much richer significance for gender theory than just being the data mine for the production of theory in the north. They offer trajectories for rethinking gender analysis at a very basic level.

4 Knowledge from the South

A range of perspectives relevant for rethinking gender has come out of the global south. Independence movements contested the intellectual hegemony of the metropole in a variety of ways, often celebrating local culture and knowledge systems. Expatriate scholars working in northern universities pushed postcolonial studies in the humanities forward. More recently, southern and decolonial perspectives have spread in the social sciences.

In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* the Maori scholar Smith (2012) argues that the mainstream idea of research itself is colonial, and presents 'a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of knowing of the Other' (2). Smith (2012) systematically unpacks the imperialist ideologies embedded in social research. She remarks that '[t]here are numerous oral stories which tell of what it means, what it feels like, to be present while your history is erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people' (31). She proposes indigenous methodologies for studying the situation of indigenous people, an approach developed in the Kaupapa Maori educational movement among contemporary Maori people in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Another important perspective sprang from the work of Indian historians, crystallized in the

periodical *Subaltern Studies*, launched in the 1980s. Led by its editor Ranajit Guha, these historians created a history-from-below approach to understanding colonial societies. Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983) is a powerful example. Reconstructing the detail of peasant risings from the records left by the colonizers, but reading these records against the grain, Guha argued that the politics of the people in colonial India was distinct and different from the politics of the elite. Western-educated, upper-caste Indian elites in colonial India became collaborators in the British Empire (or the "raj" as Guha calls it), to maintain control of the masses. The colonialists created a political voice and arena for the masculine, Western educated metropolitan Indian elite by having them vie for rewards in the form of privileges and power in governmental institutions of the raj. This ensured that the Indian elite was speaking for the raj and not in opposition to it. In contrast, the subaltern voice, unnoticed for a long time by academics, came out of the peasant movements. It was a mandate against the raj and involved a large part of the society, including women not represented by the "bourgeois elite". The subaltern voice was unassimilated and un-coopted by the colonial institution and at its core embodied the voice of the oppressed.

The term 'subaltern' itself came from the writings of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and can refer to subordination based on class, caste, gender, race, language and culture (Biswas, 2009: 200). As Dipesh Chakrabarty (one of the members of the original subaltern studies group) argues, posing such questions in colonial India forced a departure from global-North conventions for writing history, even radical history; and the subaltern studies approach has continued to evolve (Chakrabarty, 2000).

There are, thus, a range of resources available for rethinking societies in postcolonial or decolonial perspectives. But it is another step to understand gender in these terms; and often this step was a step not taken. We have seen how the subject-matter of gender research changes when we take a southern perspective, highlighting land, colonizing violence, etc. Let us now consider how concepts change, in southern perspective.

5 Changing Concepts

Philosopher Lugones (2007), whose work is based in the Latin American school of decolonial thought, has developed the concept of the 'coloniality of gender' (Lugones, 2007). This draws on the influential concept of coloniality of power introduced by Peruvian sociologist Quijano (2000), who points out that South American societies have continued to be structured by dependence on the metropole, long after formal independence. Lugones argues that indigenous communities in Latin America were not originally structured by gender, that gender is 'a colonial imposition' in Latin America. She argues that contemporary gendered scripts like sexual passivity and purity as moral premise of womanhood in Latin America are colonial imports. Such framings of gender came with colonial religions (particularly Catholic Christianity) and the public patriarchy of the colonial State. Another example of what Lugones calls the "coloniality of gender" can be seen in the erasure of the precolonial Native people's practices of matriarchy, the existence of a third gender category for intersex and trans individuals and acceptance of queer sexualities. The strict binarized, heterosexist gender order of today, was brought into and instituted in Latin American societies by colonial powers. Further, the relegation of native, non-white women to sub-human status and giving white, middle class, colonial women solely the status of real women sowed the seeds of racialized-gendering of women in Latin America that persists to this day.

Lugones drew on a line of thought already developed by scholars of the African diaspora (Oyéwùmí, 1997; Nnaemeka, 2005) who have argued that feminism itself involves cultural colonization. Northern feminist ideas override the unique African perspective on women, and erase a history of societies that were not structured by gender. Oyéwùmí (1997) maintains that feminist, queer or even postcolonial discourses

fail to challenge sufficiently the idea of Africa as primitive and so maintain colonial perspectives. This approach contests the idea that non-Western societies are burdened with primitive gender practices and structured by unreconstructed patriarchy—an idea that surfaced again in the media propaganda for the 'War on Terror' (Bahramitash, 2005; Maira, 2009).

However, scholars within Africa, such as Hendricks and Lewis (1994) and Bakare-Yusuf (2003), have strongly critiqued such formulations. The factual grounding of the claim that gender was introduced by colonialism is flimsy. The assertion of a unique African way of being is marked by cultural essentialism and conservatism. Pre-colonial African societies—and the same can be said for pre-columbian American societies—did have gender hierarchies, did interact with each other, and constantly changed over time.

We do not need to romanticize pre-colonial societies to recognize the strongly gendered character of colonization and its violent impact. The history of colonial societies involved the creation of new, racialized gender orders—an insight that has been available for a long time, in the research of scholars like the pioneering Brazilian feminist Saffioti ([1969] 1978). Colombian sociologist Mara Viveros notes the ways in which colonialism brutally established both gender and racial hierarchies (Viveros, 2007), in a configuration that has shaped the politics of the region ever since.

In the context of colonization, it is almost impossible to talk about gender divorced from race. As Valentine Mudimbe observes in *The Idea of Africa* (1994: 140) in order for the colonizers to establish the new power, they needed to reconstruct the society. There was a dis-ordering, and then a re-ordering, of gender relations in conjunction with race relations.

The rape of indigenous women by colonizing men was both a way to control indigenous bodies through violation and a way of dismantling the existing structures of sexuality, family and inheritance. The colonized population that survived was further fragmented through forced migrations—for instance collecting diverse communities into small 'reserves' on unwanted land, and taking indigenous children from their parents, putting them in foster homes or residential schools. This story of child abuse has now been exposed in both Australia and Canada. Christian missionaries who insisted on a European model of the family and patriarchal authority for indigenous communities furthered the cultural change. A racialized gender hegemony was at the heart of the imperial project, especially in its later phases. Morrell's (2001) history of settler masculinity in colonial Natal shows how the settlers too were affected, creating a dominating, even militarized, form of masculinity that was needed to exert power over a subject population.

Over the long history of colonization, segregation increased. Strict social rules against intermarriage between colonizers and colonized developed in most European empires in the second half of the nineteenth century. New hierarchies of masculinity emerged in the colonial context. The White masculine colonizer was at the top, the emasculated colonized subject below; but the colonizers also made distinctions between warrior and effeminate masculinities among the subjects, while new patterns of masculinity emerged among them (Sinha, 1995; Nandy, 1983).

The hierarchies created in the old imperialism have carried forward into global neoliberal capitalism, which makes extensive use of cheap, gender-divided labor in the periphery (Rodriguez, 2010; Parrenas, 2001). There are, of course, new institutions that have replaced the old empires. Global power is now wielded though trade relations, corporate investment, financial control, development aid programs, military aid (and embargoes), sporadic military action, and the multilateral state structure of the United Nations. Gender dynamics in the contemporary postcolonial world are embedded in all of these structures (Harcourt, 2009; Gottfried, 2013).

This has produced situations that may reverse old gender patterns. For instance, we usually think of migration as being led by male workers going to a place of opportunity or higher wages.

That still happens; but in countries like the Philippines, labour migration is led by women, as domestic and care workers. Very large numbers of women have travelled to work in middle-class households in Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, other parts of east and south-east Asia, not to mention the Gulf states and the global North (Rodriguez, 2010; Gueverra, 2010). A similar pattern developed inside China, producing the 'baomu', women domestic workers who migrated from the countryside into neoliberal Chinese cities (Yan, 2008). More cases are found in other parts of the world. When we take into account the changing gender relations within the families who employ these workers, we see a paradoxical situation. A modernization of gender relations among middle and upper middle class families is achieved by entrenching 'traditional' feminized labor from working class women, as Montecino (2001) observes of Chile, or Ray and Quayum (2009) observe of India. Yet the 'traditional' domestic work is also paradoxical, for these women are breadwinners, often supporting their families at a distance.

As we observed earlier, some of the most influential post-colonial perspectives ignored or marginalized questions of gender. Commenting on the subaltern-studies approach in a celebrated essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak agreed that Indian histories had been written from the vantage point of the colonizers or the nationalist elites, and erased the voice of the subordinated other, especially the woman: 'within this effaced track of the subaltern, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced' (Spivak, 1988: 273). Indeed the voices and the dissent of women as subaltern have been silenced in many powerful discourses. Women intellectuals like herself have a special responsibility to contest this silencing. Yet it is important that elite intellectuals should not substitute their own voices and claim to represent the subaltern. Decolonizing our histories is essential, but it is not easy.

Bulbeck (1998), who was mentioned at the start of this chapter, criticizes the conventional debate over women's global sameness or difference, and traces the multiple ways in which women in the south have blended tradition and modernity. They have dealt both with colonial constructions of gendered ways of living and local assertions of particular femininities. Women in postcolonial societies have a history of struggle and dissent and do not require 'saving'. Bulbeck notes ironically that more women were tenured at Delhi University in India than at Harvard University in the United States. She also presents a harsh critique of the individual-rights discourse that homogenizes women's issues across societies and cultures. She shows how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is potentially less than universal, in practice excluding the most marginalized of women. No doctrine from the global north should be imposed on women in the rest of the world; instead, Bulbeck advocates the 'braiding' of multiple feminisms on a world scale. We might call this a solidarity-based epistemology for understanding gender.

6 The Gender Theory We Can Hope for

As we mentioned earlier, mainstream gender studies has not ignored globalization. There are now collections of global gender research (e.g. Bennett, 2008; Bose & Kim, 2009; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003), and special issues of northern journals that concern the south. The difficulty is that most of this scholarship still uses theories and methodologies from the metropole as its framework—which is true even of most work done by researchers located in southern countries, because of the extraversion of mainstream scholarship there.

It is another step to grapple with the great historical transformations that constitute gender in the contemporary world, through an epistemology that prioritises the experience and thought of the colonized and postcolonial world.

Yet a postcolonial approach is vital to understanding the metropole itself. It is not only that understanding historical disruptions and re-building of gender orders across the colonized world gives us tools for understanding what happens in the disruptions of twenty-first century

economic crises and neoliberal politics in the metropole. Feminism in the north as well as feminism around the global south stands to gain from the vision of a wider world, the dramatic expansion in what gender analysis can be.

A solidarity-based view of knowledge requires the habit of analyzing gender *fundamentally* from the lens of coloniality. Building solidarity is not easy, given the history of colonialism entrenched in racism, gender violence and institutional orthodoxies. But making the attempt is vital; southern theory is an asset, not a hindrance. For northern knowledge institutions this means extensive overhaul of curricula. It also means changes in the benchmarks for scholarly competence—a shift towards a model of world competence oriented to social justice rather than a competitive individualism focused on 'top journals'.

In the periphery, a solidarity-based epistemology means challenging deep-seated habits of deference to the metropole. It means building new forms of south/south linkage among gender scholars and movements. It is not enough to have individual pieces of work from the south. It is by seeing this work *as a whole* that we become conscious of a body of knowledge with a scope and sophistication comparable to the output of the metropole.

Gender studies needs to move to a world-centered, solidarity-based approach to knowledge. There is at present no Southern Gender Theory as a unified model, and perhaps there never will be. This is a field in dynamic development. What we can do now is change the way we look at gender realities in both the south and the north. New forms of theory, and hopefully action, will emerge as we do.

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