



Organizing transnationally across differences

Interview mit Chandra Talpade Mohanty

Seit mehr als zwei Jahrzehnten beeinflusst die Arbeit von Chandra Talpade Mohanty Themen zur globalen feministischen Organisation. Sie wurde international nach ihrem einflussreichen Essay „Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses“ 1986 bekannt. In diesem Artikel kritisierte die indische Wissenschaftlerin das politische Projekt von westlichen Feminismen und den Begriff „Dritte-Welt-Frauen“ als hegemoniale Einheit. Sie gab darin vielen „Dritte-Welt-Feministinnen“ in ihrem Kampf eine Stimme und Raum innerhalb globaler feministischer Praxis. Diese Schrift wurde zu einem Prüfstein für feministische Kämpfe und hat zu einer Neudefinition von Machtbeziehungen zwischen „Erste-Welt-“ und „Dritte-Welt“-Feministinnen geführt. In den letzten Jahren standen Feministinnen aber vor einer Reihe von weiteren Herausforderungen.

Claudia Dal-Bianco von der Frauen*solidarität hat Chandra Talpade Mohanty (CM) zu transnationaler feministischer Organisation und über die Möglichkeit, Brücken zwischen Wissenschaft und Aktivismus zu schlagen, befragt.

“Under western eyes” became a must-read for everyone who deals with feminist struggles on a global level. It led to the redefining of power relations between “first world” and “third world” feminists. The dichotomization is very relevant, but during the last decade feminists have also been addressing another set of challenges. Globalization is transforming women’s work. What opportunities lay in these changes? Are similarities between women in the Global North and South increasing? Where do you see improvements in the feminist discourse?

CM: I have always maintained that women in the Global South and the Global North (or first and third world or one-third and two-thirds world)

have “common differences” based on the colonial/neo-colonial/capitalist histories we share globally. So while “Under Western Eyes” spoke back to hegemonic western feminism that erased or stereotyped the historical, material differences, and genealogies of resistance of women in the so-called “third world,” I have always maintained that the common histories of exploitation and oppression women share across national borders create possibilities for solidarity and resistance. Processes of globalization have transformed women’s work such that feminist theorization of public/private, and intimate/emotional economies have shifted, creating new ways of thinking and organizing across geopolitical divides. Thus, women workers in multinational factories, in care work, and sex work have organized in creative ways against globalized exploitative structures across the globe. Feminist discourses around race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and nation have become more nuanced as a result of acknowledging both power differences among feminist communities, as well as the common differences that can lead to ethical solidarities across divides.

Organizing transnationally requires working through the differences of national location and power relations that stem from where we are located. What kind of work do you see as necessary to reconcile this tension?

CM: Organizing transnationally across differences in power requires first and foremost, becoming fluent in each other’s histories and the specificity of our struggles. I believe that hard work that honestly defines our own stakes, as well as our accountability to the larger feminist struggles we are engaged in is key to reconciling the tension that arises from internal power differences. This work involves figuring out how to define our visions for justice and our organizing strategies such that we are attentive to issues that are location specific but do not remain location bound. The challenge

is how to create transnational solidarities that are ethical, accountable, and honor different genealogies and to understand the intersectionality of our struggles and social movements.

Regarding your bio, as you come from India, having lived in the USA for quite a while. In some interviews you mentioned that the space for immigrant “third world women” (like you) was truncated in western feminist theory. Do you still experience that? Can you preserve your position as “an outsider within” or is it not necessary for you?

CM: I have always preserved my position as an outsider within even though my status and power in the western academy has shifted over the last three decades. I think being an outsider within is not just about my own history as an immigrant woman of color from India, but it is also about a critical relation to the academy itself. It has always been important to me to have one foot inside the academy and one foot firmly outside in multiracial organizing spaces that have nothing to do with the academy. If I didn’t believe that insurgent knowledges are produced in many different spaces, especially in organizing and social movement spaces, I could easily become a colonized insider in the academy. The outsider within positionality is necessary to maintain an anti-racist decolonial perspective in the neoliberal US academy. And although the space for third world immigrant women of color voices in the academy (and in feminist theory) has increased in the last two decades, we are still working in a white supremacist, masculinist, neoliberal academy that seeks to appropriate and manage our critiques! And so we must continue to resist. But I do think that feminist theory has been transformed in fundamental ways by transnational women of color epistemologies. And this is the result of collective theoretical and organizing work of generations of women of color in and outside the academy.

Thank you for the interview!