

**The Irony of Appropriation in Chela Sandoval's  
Differential Consciousness:  
A Reflection on the Reproduction of Appropriation  
In a U.S. Third World Feminist Text**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the articulations found in texts produced under the following rubrics of feminism: U.S. hegemonic feminism, U.S. third world feminism, and “feminism” in Mexico. This literary analysis will signal how some of the shortcomings produced within Chela Sandoval’s use of narrative and language, in the second chapter of *Methodology of the Oppressed*, affect a reader’s conception of these rubrics of feminism. It begins with an analysis of Sandoval’s mapping of U.S. hegemonic feminism as one produced by white scholars whose focus on the ‘female subject in Europe and Anglo America’ “reproduces exclusionary forms of knowledge.” It looks closely at Sandoval’s rhetoric, with the aide of Hayden White’s “The Poetics of History”, as she explicates Showalter’s “Toward a Feminist Poetics” with the intention of situating the history that led to the formation of U.S. third world feminism. The next component explores how Sandoval’s use of rhetorical devices help her define U.S. third world feminism as a differential body that is not in direct opposition to U.S. hegemonic feminism, whose purpose is to produce texts that “reflect a global consciousness” and a challenge to the distinctions of nation-state (establish a relation with third world spaces). In conclusion, this paper puts forward the irony of appropriation Sandoval’s articulation creates when she situates Chicana feminist texts produced under U.S. third world feminism, and states Chicanas exercise their differential consciousness when they speak of their relation to “Mexican feminism”.

**Introduction: U.S. Third World Feminism: A Differential Social Movement**

With *Methodology of the Oppressed* Sandoval joins the anti-hegemonic school of thought that rose, in the early 80’s, in response to the dominion exerted by some scholars through exclusionary practices in feminism in the United States. In the second chapter of her book, “U.S. Third World feminism: A differential Social Movement I,” Chela Sandoval critiques feminist scholars for failing to acknowledge the efforts and struggles of feminists of color in the United States. Sandoval argues that such failure caused by the production of strictly Eurocentric, and monolithic models of understanding the history of feminism in the U.S.. Sandoval draws on a genealogy of the feminist movement in the United States to construct her recognition of the rhetoric of resistance of U.S third world feminists. Sandoval underlines eurocentrism, and the unilateral structure of the genealogy of the feminist movement as factors that fashion the problematic [mis]representation of the history of feminism in the United States.

Sandoval also identifies the rhetoric of resistance of women of color in the feminist movement of the U.S. as U.S. third world feminism and ascribes to subjects of this group the capability of a differential

consciousness. She underlines hegemony in U.S. feminism as a problem that is born from euro centrism and monolithic constructions, and causes the exclusion of the efforts of U.S. Third World Feminism.

Sandoval describes U.S. third world feminism as one that does not oppose, and is unlike, U.S. hegemonic feminism mainly because U.S. third world feminism reflects a global consciousness, but why does Sandoval identify global consciousness as a key factor for resistance? She explains that a subject who possesses a global [differential] consciousness is capable of being mobile within a given situation. This means a person who holds a differential consciousness is aware of the web of direct and indirect factors that shape a given situation. According to Sandoval, U.S. third world feminists are aware of the multiple forms of oppression that women are subject to—political, economic, ethnic, etc—and can enact resistance from multiple modes of opposition.

When Sandoval gives recognition to feminists of color, she does not question the linguistic reduction of multiple communities into a monolithic identity. Reducing communities to a monolithic identity limits a reader's perception and a reader's expectation. Grouping various communities into one form of perceiving and understanding them also allows for the production and reproduction of hegemony because it fails to provide paths for provoking a reader's mobile awareness within a text. This close reading of Sandoval's text is concerned with the rhetorical devices she uses to construct the resistance of feminists of color into U.S. third world feminism. What impact does Sandoval's recognition have on the perception and expectations of Chicana feminism? Do her narrative, tone, and structure reveal how a reader's perception and expectations are directly influenced by the content of the second chapter of *Methodology of the Oppressed*?

## **The Rhetorical Construction of Hegemony**

The rhetorical devices Sandoval employs in “*U.S. Third World Feminism: Differential Social Movement P*” will help find how Sandoval's discourse influences a reader's perception and expectation(s) of Chicana feminists. As Sonia Corcuera de Mancera's explains in *Voces y silencios en la historia: Siglos XIX y XX*, Hayden White finds:

Solo a través de las estructuras de lenguaje...la calidad del trabajo del historiador no depende, como sucedía antes, de la cantidad de datos que logre reunir, ni de su supuesta objetividad. Lo que define la calidad del texto es el efecto que el autor logre producir en sus lectores, lo que, a su vez, depende del ánimo con que escriba. 361

The degree of impact a scholar has on a reader is influenced by how she structures language and enthusiasm/attitude of the scholar are transplanted to the reader through these. If the impact a writer has on a reader stems from the rhetorical tools employed in text. Then Sandoval's narrative is her response to structures she found in other texts and this will influence her choice of rhetorical tools and plot structures when she records her response. In *Metahistory*, Hayden White develops a theory for understanding how an author's use of literary tools and plot structures function in a text. White postulates that “each historian chooses a mode of emplotment, a mode of argument, and a mode of ideological implication”<sup>[iv]</sup> that will best suit her purpose. White associates each mode of structure and rhetoric he lists to a trope—a linguistic term that refers to the figurative use of expression.

White postulates a writer has the intention of creating an unambiguous representation, which means she will prefiguratively grasp and prepare her objective for conscious apprehension. <sup>[v]</sup> Sandoval critically creates an unambiguous representation of U.S. third world feminism in her text as she demonstrates how U.S. third world feminism, U.S. hegemonic feminism stem from this genealogy of the U. S feminist movement. She uses the genealogical model to explain that hegemonic feminism is produced by white scholars who focus on the female subject in Europe and Anglo America, and therefore produce and reproduce the exclusion of efforts of women of color. This hegemony is the domination exercised by some scholars over others through a partial articulation of political and ideological concepts

necessitating the acknowledgement of feminist of color resistance as U.S. third world feminism rises. Sandoval's text then becomes a conscious encapsulation of her reactions to the exclusionary practices of U.S. hegemonic feminist scholars. What are the devices Sandoval utilizes to assemble this conscious apprehension?

White defines mode of emplotment as a "way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind."<sup>[vi]</sup> In other words, mode of emplotment refers to the literary tools and rhetoric an author uses to assemble the objective of a story.

the "historian is not (or claims not to be) telling the story 'for its own sake,' he is inclined to emplot his stories in the most conventional forms—as fairy tale or detective story on the one hand, as Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, or Satire on the other. *White*, 7.

Sandoval's mode of emplotment can show us how she shapes U.S. third world feminism; by recognizing feminists of color in the U.S. she produces an expectation of other perspectives in her readers.

Sandoval underlines faults she finds in the representation of the U.S. feminist movement in the genealogy. Her mode of emplotment resembles what White identifies as Satire. Satire, as a mode of emplotment, gains "precisely by frustrating normal expectations about the kinds of resolutions provided by stories cast in other modes (Romance, Comedy, or Tragedy)."<sup>[vii]</sup> Sandoval's isolates faults finds in the genealogy to unveil how U.S. third world feminism is an absent body within U.S. hegemonic feminism.

Sandoval centers her argument on Elaine Showalter's "*Towards a Feminist Poetics*" and Allison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* and their focus on the three-stage genealogical model of U.S. feminism. Sandoval satirizes these texts, among others, as she explains how the model becomes a generally accepted truth despite the attitude of superiority and the monolithic structure—qualities that led to the exclusion of the resistance of feminists of color.

Sandoval finds Showalter's text projects an attitude of superiority: "these three stages represent succeeding higher levels of historical, moral, political and aesthetic development."<sup>[viii]</sup> Showalter's text describes the three-stage model as a "higher level of...", what this arrogance ultimately implies is that the genealogy is an all-encompassing model that should be held as work of superior quality. "Hegemonic feminist scholars produced the histories of feminist consciousness that they believed typified the modes of exchange operating within the oppositional spaces of the women's movement" (Sandoval 46). According to Sandoval such histories are "believed" to typify modes of opposition within the feminist movement. Sandoval's use of "believed" underlines that she is critical of this resolution. Sandoval uses texts produced by U.S. hegemonic scholars that reflect this attitude—texts that are "believed" to represent opposition in the feminist movement in the U.S.—in order to construct her recognition of feminists of color.

Sandoval also finds each stage in the genealogy is articulated as a form of opposition that stands "completely incompatible" with the others. The genealogy does not describe the feminist struggles as continuous but as sporadic organized action, implying that everyone shared the same ideas, needs, and goals at the same time. Even though each stage is believed to typify all opposition in the feminist movement in the U.S., it fails to account for the resistance of U.S. third world feminists. Sandoval suggests that when an uncritical reader comes into contact with texts like these (Showalter's and Jaggar's) it becomes more likely for the reader to adopt and reproduce the attitude and unilateral views projected in the texts. This is because the reader's apprehension of the material is limited to the reduced perspectives and expectations outlined within the boundaries of the text.

White's satirical mode of emplotment happens when an author's narrative builds on the absurdity of another text. According to "White's Theory of Topes" a narrative that is built on the absurdity of another text falls into Irony. Hence, Sandoval's expression in the second chapter becomes ironic; Sandoval builds U.S. third world feminism based on the absurdities she finds in "the great hegemonic model." White states that "the aim of the ironic statement is to affirm tacitly the negative of what is on the literal level affirmed positively, or the reverse" (White 37). Sandoval assures the genealogy fails to acknowledge heterogeneity in each of the theoretical waves of the genealogical model produced by U.S. hegemonic scholars, and so exclusion is produced. But how does this become Irony? White states that

irony “points to the potential foolishness of all linguistic characterizations of reality as much as to the absurdity of the belief it parodies” (White, 39). Accepting the linguistic reduction of the as an intrinsic fact is Ironic.

Sandoval’s irony accomplishes her recognition of U.S. third world feminism by demonstrating how the absurd model of the world produced and reproduced the exclusion of the efforts of feminists of color. As the hegemonic school of thought becomes a widely accepted conventional form of understanding feminism, work regarding the issue of women being subject to multiple forms of oppression becomes less likely to appear in the model. In her critique Sandoval also proceeds to elaborate U.S. third world feminism as a community that, unlike U.S. hegemonic feminism, possesses a differential consciousness that allows them to articulate heterogeneous forms of oppression and resistance. Sandoval states “U.S third world feminism provided access to a different way of conceptualizing not just feminist consciousness but oppositional activity in general.” [vii]

### *Differential Consciousness: A Monolithic Construction?*

Sandoval underlines that ‘the great hegemonic model’ addresses only a few forms of opposition—mocking male discourse, a “feminist history of consciousness,” and women as their own identity—and does not address the larger issue of diversity. Sandoval wants her readers to understand this leads to exclusionary practices, divisions, and antagonisms within the movement. And an awareness of diversity discusses the multiple forms of oppression a woman may be subject to are not discussed.

Sandoval explains U.S. third world feminists, unlike U.S. hegemonic feminists, view and addresses the issues of diversity because they possess a “differential consciousness.”

Differential consciousness represents a strategy of oppositional ideology...Its powers can be thought of as a mobile—not nomadic, but rather cinematographic: a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically, transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienations, perversion, and reformations in both spectators and practitioners (*Sandoval, 43*). By operating with a differential consciousness U.S third world feminists are able to approach a situation from multiple perspectives. So, differential consciousness enables feminists of color to see oppression as an effect of more than one cause.

Sandoval directs her readers’ attention to Chicana feminism as an example of U.S. third world feminism that possesses a differential consciousness:

In 1987, Gloria Anzaldua specified that the practice of radical U.S. third world feminism requires the development of a differential consciousness that can be both applied and generalized: ‘la conciencia de la ‘mestiza.’ This is the consciousness of the ‘mixed blood,’ she writes, born of life lived in the ‘crossroads’ between races, nations, languages, genders, sexualities, and cultures, an acquired subjectivity formed out of transformation and relocation.” 60

Sandoval identifies Anzaldua as a U.S. third world feminist. Sandoval agrees with Anzaldua’s statement, a differential consciousness comes inherently with “mixed blood.” Global consciousness is born from being “mixed blood,” living between races, nations, languages, genders. So, when a Chicana articulates her “mixed blood” in bilingual expressions she acknowledges “the Mexican” as part of her identity. Sandoval promotes the conception of Chicana feminism as part of the U.S. third world feminist community who inherently possess a differential consciousness. She does as she defines differential consciousness with Chicana feminist texts. This allows an individual to deduce that the best way of challenging oppression through ideological means is to be differential like a Chicana.

Sandoval turns her readers to Chicana feminist texts like Cherrie Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* for further inquiry on U.S third world feminism and differential consciousness. Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years* is now expected to be an expression of differential consciousness that Sandoval postulates in her recognition of U.S. third world feminists. When reading Moraga’s text it may be drawn that Moraga exercises her differential consciousness when she speaks of Coyolxauhqui, an Aztec moon goddess:

I had never heard of Coyolxauhqui, severed into pieces in the war against her brother, but I knew her brokenness...She, like me, was a woman betrayed by her brother. She was an ancient Xicanawarrior deported into darkness. I, a young Xicanadyke, writing in exile.

Moraga identifies herself with this goddess because the goddess is betrayed by her brother, and by her own community, the Chicano community, for being a lesbian and Chicana. Moraga speaks of how sexual orientation is another reason for oppression within a marginal community in the U.S. Moraga employs a global consciousness when she mentions the Aztec goddess; Coyolxauhqui is Moraga's recognition of "the Mexican" in her identity. Moraga's discourse seems to accomplish Sandoval's recommendations; but, to what extent is Moraga's crossing of nation-state boundaries in her narrative "differential consciousness"?

When Moraga incorporates Coyolxauhqui she provides a brief endnote with the history of this goddess. The endnote does not address how some Mexican feminists find Chicanos usage of "the Mexican", as an attempt to define a separate, and sometimes superior, identity to that of a white scholar. Elena Urrutia, a Mexican scholar explains: "este grupo, necesitado de explicarse en una sociedad ajena, acude a ambas para asentar en ellas [icons of the Mexican]—entre otros muchos elementos—sus raíces."<sup>[viii]</sup> Chicanas, in need of defining their identity in a foreign society, relay on "the Aztec" to illustrate their distinctiveness. Urrutia questions the focus on goddesses in these sorts of narratives by posing the following question: "detras de esta figura conspicua ¿que mujeres quedan ocultas?"<sup>[ix]</sup> What lies obscured behind the iconized Mexican element? She finds the use of Aztec deities as icons of the Mexican identity leads to the denial of heterogeneity in Mexican communities. And thus, Moraga falls into a thin line between differential consciousness and the romantization of a culture.

Diana Reches explains the romantization/folklorization of certain cultural expressions happens because:

la concepcion de folklore, identidad, fue utilizada de una manera tan facil y superficial que aveces bastaba con ponerse un poncho, un wipil y un par de apargatas, guitarra o quena en mano, para <<ser latinoamericano>> y reivindicar <<nuestra identidad>><sup>[x]</sup>

Even though Moraga provides the history of Coyolxauhqui in an endnote, Moraga does not inform her readers of the social concerns regarding the problematological effects that may result from the romantization of a culture. Moraga only uses the goddess to affirm her difference. Moraga's differential consciousness becomes just the folklorization of a community, and not really an effort to align social concerns. This is why Sandoval's differential consciousness becomes a highly idealistic form of opposition that may lead to the folklorization of marginal communities.

## Conclusion

In the second chapter of *Methodology of the Oppressed* Sandoval shapes U.S. hegemonic feminism, U.S. third world feminism, and differential consciousness, in her recognition of the rhetoric of resistance of feminists of color in the U.S. Sandoval constructs the meaning of each concept through her mode of emplotment, the presentation and structure of her work. The most significant example of this process is her interpretation of texts produced by the group of scholars who is identified as U.S. hegemonic feminists: represented by Jaggar and Showalter. Sandoval carefully plots her argument by focusing on the limitations of that scholarship—an attitude of superiority and a monolithic structure. She believes that this hegemony is the cause of exclusion of feminists of color from the history of the U.S. feminist movement.

Sandoval gives recognition to the resistance feminists of color by postulating their resistance, unlike U.S. hegemonic feminists, stems from a differential consciousness. Sandoval builds the concept of differential consciousness as a quality born from the conscious awareness of the multiple forms of oppression women are subject to, so it averts feminists of color from being Eurocentric and exclusive.

Sandoval finalizes her recognition by setting efforts of feminists of color as those of Chicana feminists as identifiers, or representatives, of U.S. third world feminism. When looking closely at how Chicanas align social movements in their narrative I found that they didn't entirely fulfill Sandoval's promise of differential consciousness. For example, Moraga's piece does not align her with concerns of Mexican scholars when she makes reference to Coyolxhauqui.

Sandoval linguistically reduces the efforts of feminists of color into U.S. third world feminist identity that acts on a differential mode. How does she reduce these efforts? Sandoval allows the reader to understand U.S. third world feminism as a community better than U.S. hegemonic feminism. Sandoval leads to Chicana feminists like Anzaldua and Moraga, among others, to provide examples U.S. third world feminists exercising a differential consciousness. Sandoval's construction of differential consciousness turned out to be highly unrealistic. If Sandoval's narrative had allowed readers mobility and not a unilateral when constructing differential consciousness, readers would understand that there might be distinct expressions of differential consciousness and that it's not strictly located in U.S. third world feminism.

## NOTES

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[i] Feminists of color in the U.S.

[ii] Walker, Joshua. Hayden White's Metahistory. p1

[iii] White, 34

[iv] Metahistory, p.7

[v] Metahistory, p.8

[vi] Sandoval, 47

[vii] Sandoval, 41

[viii] Urrutia, Elena. "Primeros siglos de historia: la mujer en la cultura mexicana", 119

[ix] Urrutia, 118

[x] The folklorization of culture happens when cultural identity commoditized into iconography: a garment, a style of dressing, etc.

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