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War in Ukraine

Ukrainian Feminists under Western Eyes

- Debate - 2022 - Ukraine -

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“I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here—to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances. Jodi Dean (1996) develops a notion of ‘reflective solidarity’ that I find particularly useful. She argues that reflective solidarity is crafted by an interaction involving three persons: ‘I ask you to stand by me over and against a third.’ This involves thematizing the third voice ‘to reconstruct solidarity as an inclusive ideal,’ rather than as an ‘us vs. them’ notion. Dean’s notion of a communicative, in-process understanding of the ‘we’ is useful, given that solidarity is always an achievement, the result of active struggle to construct the universal on the basis of particulars/differences. It is the praxis-oriented, active political struggle embodied in this notion of solidarity that is important to my thinking—and the reason I prefer to focus attention on solidarity rather than on the concept of ‘sisterhood.’” [1]

— Chandra Tapade Mohanty

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[1] Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham & London: Duke. University Press. p.7.

[2] For an overview on the ideological and organizational principles of the Kurdish Women’s Movement: Dirik, Dilar (2017) “Self-Defense Means Political Autonomy! The Women’s Movement of Kurdistan Envisioning and Pursuing New Paths for Radical Democratic Autonomy”. [Development 60, 74–79](#).

[3] openDemocracy, 7 March 2017 [“Feminist pacifism or passive-ism?”](#).

[4] The use of the word peshmerga to designate Kurdish women fighters is problematic. Peshmerga refers to the Kurdish fighters in Iraq. As Dilar Dirik and Bahar Munzir explain, Kurdish women fighters in Iraq are in a very small minority within the combat units where there is a rigid sexual division of labor, as the two parties leading Iraqi Kurdistan are patriarchal. Yet women fighters in the YPJ and YJA-Star are often mistakenly referred to as peshmerga by the Western media. Cynthia Cockburn reproduces this error in her article, which in turn is taken up by the interviewees.

[5] openDemocracy, 28 April 2015 [“The pacifist dilemma: women peacemakers’ responses to Islamic State”](#).

[6] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses”, *boundary 2*, Vol. 12, No. 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism. (Spring - Autumn, 1984), pp. 333-358.

[7] *LeftEast*, 30 April 2022 [“On the Frontier of Whiteness? Expropriation, War, and Social Reproduction in Ukraine”](#).

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[8] Where the word “Europe” is mostly identified with the European Union as a marker of “civilization” against those considered “barbarians” who don’t belong in it or refuse its discipline.

[9] Catherine Samary [“Comments on the “Feminist Manifesto Against War””](#).

[10] Smith, Barbara and Beverly (2015) “Across the Kitchen Table: A Sister-to-Sister Dialogue”. in Moraga and Anzaldúa (eds.) *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. SUNY Press: New York. p.119.