

## Solidarity, Knowledge and Social Hope

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*The paper investigates the ideas of solidarity and social hope textured in critiquing western epistemology and politics of knowledge production. Richard Rorty's anti-foundationalist, anti-representationalist critique argues for the de-hierarchization of knowledge-claims. The cultural-conversational turn to knowledge and social hope in the creation of democratic community finds its rationale in the conception of human solidarity, in the most praiseworthy human abilities of trust and cooperation. The idea of social hope, a critical engagement of the knower with knowledge production in the feminist discourse, however, is another anti-essentialist stance that illuminates the various axes of domination, which the pragmatization of knowledge and methods does not account for. It is in this context, that the paper examines the politics of solidarity vis-à-vis knowledge construction in Donna Haraway, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Marnia Lazreg and argues that solidarity as dissent provides the knower a chance to articulate hope in the transformative goals of knowledge and education.*

**Keywords:** critique of epistemology, Rorty, politics of knowledge, politics of solidarity, social hope

### Introduction

The Western epistemology situates knowledge-claims on a vertical plane either as rational, transcendental essences or as true representations in the Glassy essence of the knower's incorrigibility. The Cartesian epistemology has dominated the orthodox conception of philosophy as a "mirror of nature". This conception of knowledge as a perfect representation of reality is undergirded by a modernist prejudice of absolute truth, wedded to the absolute conception of reality. Richard Rorty's anti-foundational, anti-representational polemic against philosophy-as-epistemology, a seventeenth century disciplinary emergence, particularly in the writings of Descartes, condemns it as a *demarcative* project, an unnatural desire for certainty. In opposition to the verticality of the cognitive/non-cognitive, epistemology/hermeneutics, hard/soft sciences divide, Rorty argues for the horizontal figure of epistemology. The horizontal configuration of epistemology appreciates many perspectives and points of view emanating from the diversity and heterogeneity of human culture as bona fide determinants of knowledge. Rorty's abiding faith in the universality of hermeneutic praxis rather licenses everyone to construct her own little whole, her own little language-game and crawl into it. Nonetheless, hermeneutics is also a hope for conversation, finding new skills, new virtues to learn and grow in confronting other cultures/domains in the most praiseworthy human abilities of trust and cooperation. Rorty charges the

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Platonic-Aristotelian conception of rationality *to penetrate appearance into reality* as weakening of social fabric, divisive of society into the lovers and deniers of truth. If the hierarchy of knowledge-claims refrains us from doing interesting things with methods, the idea of solidarity as moral expansion, in being tolerant to even the wildest differences/cultures is a democratic hope for equal chance and opportunity of happiness for all. The utopia of liberal democracy sought in de-hierarchization and pragmatization of knowledge is, however, an expression of a deep-seated faith in human solidarity. Bernstein accuses Rorty of “deep humanism” that “there is nothing that we can rely on but ourselves and our fellow human beings” (Bernstein 2008, p. 22). The myth of solidarity, according to him, gives us only the idea of personalized progress, and does not radicalize the conception of a democratic life. Rorty’s critique of knowledge hierarchy replacing epistemology with social hope, however, does not address the exclusionary logic of subjugation in the production of knowledge. Seeing from the *below*, from the historical, embodied and agential accounts of experiences/meanings is a critical engagement with underlying patterns and structures of domination in the creations of meanings and bodies. Haraway, Mohanty and, Lazreg in problematizing the questions of identity and difference, entangled in the production of knowledge and meanings, theorize feminist solidarity as an analytic space to articulate alternative insurgent knowledges and pedagogies. The politics of solidarity vis-à-vis the politics of knowledge, in building connections *contra* the logic of “us vs. them”, and in articulating oppositional practices, offers a new metaphor of *vision*. Conceptualization of knowledge in and through solidarity, as an ethical-political stance, provides the knower a chance to articulate hope in the transforming ideals of knowledge and education. In the following sections, the paper examines Rorty’s post-philosophical social hope and the feminist praxis of solidarity. From the feminist perspective of solidarity that accentuates the cultural-conversational account of knowledge, and offers an active dissent to the appropriationist logic of objectification we can rearticulate the idea of social hope.

### **Rorty’s Post-philosophy and Solidarity**

Rorty’s anti-foundationalist, anti-representationalist critique of western epistemology is anti-Platonic. More precisely, it is anti-dualist and anti-essentialist. Drawing out appearance/reality, inside/outside, essence/accident, found/made binaries, according to him, is not a useful vocabulary now for the present finitist, experimentalist age that cares for a global, cosmopolitan, classless and a casteless society. Rorty (1999) charges the Platonic-Aristotelian conception of rationality in humankind’s most distinctive and praiseworthy ability *to penetrate appearance into reality* as weakening of the social fabric, divisive of society into the lovers and deniers of truth. The Platonic belief in the Really Real, soul’s immateriality and co-naturality with the outside reality, a divinely, non-human affiliation to some antecedent grounding is an escape from the human finitude, from our engagement with the contingent world. Platonism, to him, is an obstacle to social hope when what we are and what we should do is decisive upon some eternal, absolute truths.

In quite an un-Platonic manner, Rorty defends his idea of rationality in humankind's most praiseworthy ability of trust and cooperation. Following his academic hero Dewey, he considers that abandoning the worn out Platonic vocabulary of dualisms "will help bring us together, by enabling us to realize that trust, social cooperation and social hope are where our humanity begins and ends" (Rorty 1999, p. xv).

The idea of solidarity, a sense of community in making our institutions more just and less cruel, for Rorty, has no foundations in human nature; it rather stakes its claim in the human condition that "we all feel pain and humiliation in the same manner" (Rorty 1989). This imaginative sensitivity is thus thought of encompassing even the wildest differences. The articulation of human rationality as moral expansion in the ability of trust and cooperation envisages a democratic hope of equal opportunity and equal chance for happiness, a goal that Rorty says "is not written in the stars" (Rorty 1999, p. xxix). The modern professionalized disciplinary privilege of philosophy as a "mirror of nature" that dichotomizes serious/non-serious, hard/soft sciences, epistemology/hermeneutics is of no hope in this regard. Against this divisive representationalist language that disconnects 'will to truth' from 'will to happiness', the hermeneutic turn, the universality of communicative praxis, learning and growing in confronting alien cultures and discourses, to him, is a vocabulary of solidarity, increasing our abilities to cope well with our contingent needs and purposes. This conversational vocabulary of evolving consensus repudiates epistemology's desire for an ideal terminus, cracking the Code of all codes. Contrary to the desire for methodologically securing that our future is in the right direction of getting at the essences – human and non-human, the goal of inquiry, Rorty stresses, is to build our self-image of doing interesting things with methods, use them to reweave our beliefs, increase our chances of a better satisfactory future over the less satisfactory present.

Rorty's de-professionalization of philosophy aims to regain its cultural position and accentuate the cultural-conversational character of all inquiries. According to him, "...philosophy is one of the techniques for reweaving our vocabulary of moral deliberation in order to accommodate new beliefs" (Rorty 1989, p. 196). Rorty (2007) emphasizes that philosophy has always been a transitional genre. Changing the discourse from the love of God to the more workable idea of truth, for example, is how philosophy has been insightful for humanity. Reweaving our beliefs and practices, changing the course of conversation, persuading new roles, and new social practices is the cultural value of philosophy that makes it *optional*. That is, one can choose it like a literary text or a novel, or poetry in meeting some needs. This takes away philosophy's justificatory preeminence and authority in matters of truth, reality, god etc. that are believed to occur to us naturally.<sup>1</sup> And, this utilitarian ethic also does not make philosophy an expert giving a grand theory of risk management. "Cultural politics is the least norm-governed human activity", states Rorty (2007, p. 21).

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<sup>1</sup>Rejecting philosophy's claim of epistemic authority, *pace* Brandom, Rorty argues that the question of authority, particularly epistemic authority, belongs to social practices and any belief in the ideas of truth, reality, objectivity other than the society are the "disguised moves" (Rorty 2007, p. 7).

Rorty's idea of philosophy as cultural politics aims to repudiate not only philosophy's justificatory pre-eminence but also that of any other discourse that upholds a universalist, essentialist position. At the same time, it accentuates the cultural-conversational nature of inquiry that can be appreciated as the idea of tolerant epistemology and hope for a democratic future. Rorty's "redescription" of philosophy, striking off the age-old disciplinary antagonisms between philosophy, poetry and sophistry, indicates this position. To him, both philosophy and poetry in claiming ineluctable truths, and in confronting the ineffable respectively are unpragmatic and unreliable, *the public relation gimmicks*. The metaphors of grandeur and profundity, the absolute conception of reality and encountering the ineffable in the depth of one's soul, liberating philosophy and poetry from any conceptual mutation, assign privilege to rationalism and romanticism respectively.<sup>2</sup> Alluding to Isaiah Berlin, Rorty concedes that both universalism and romanticism, in exalting reason-passion divide, are the expressions of "the infinite" (of the ontotheological tradition). The idea of infinite in universalism or rationalism is that of an over-arching framework something against which nothing else has any power and romanticism's idea of infinity abandons all constraints "in particular all the limitations imposed by the human past... It is the idea of perfect freedom decoupled from that of perfect knowledge and of affiliation with the invulnerable" (Rorty 2007, p. 83). Rorty's argument is that universalism (including Habermasian metaphysical proclivity to universal validity in his defense of communicative rationality) dramatizes the need for intersubjective agreement and romanticism dramatizes the need for novelty, need to be imaginative in finding newer solutions to our contingent problems. Philosophy, according to him, balances both these needs. Without invoking the promise of universal validity and evading from responsibility, cultural politics of new, imaginative ideas, new prophecies negotiates a space that aligns philosophy with poetry and sophistry. Neo-sophistry, the cultural role of philosophy, and inquiry in general, has been looked at as hope envisaging the democratization of knowledge and creation of democratic community.

Democratic hope, Rorty argues, requires experimental tinkering with liberal institutions and not any philosophical foundation. Although the articulation of the political does not entail from the common human essence, a philosophical *back up*, Rorty's idea of democratic hope in trusting human abilities to cooperate and find newer solutions to contingent needs and desires is a deep faith in human solidarity. His idea of solidarity, a non-methodic account of rationality, is that of civic virtues of "tolerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force" (Rorty 1991, p. 37). On this account of rationality, more like the differences of "sane" and "reasonable" than the rational/irrational, cognitive/non-cognitive divide, Rorty has argued, that science (differentiating science as a "community of solidarity" from science as "community of objectivity") is a moral exemplar, an exemplar of increasing intersubjective agreement about what truth is, "a commendatory term for well-

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<sup>2</sup>The latest variant of this divisive and less useful vocabulary, according to Rorty, is C. P. Snow's "two-cultures" syndrome, i.e., whether human beings can attain their fullest potentiality by using rational or imaginative faculties (Rorty 2007, p. 74).

justified beliefs” (Rorty 1991, p. 24). He also emphasizes, “these are the virtues which members of a civilized society must possess if the society is to endure” (Rorty 1991, p. 37). The shift in the conception of human rationality as accurately mirroring reality to the vocabulary of edification, hermeneutic openness, a moral expansion of a “free and open encounter” across exotic cultures/discourses thus suffices to weave the political utopia of a liberal society.

Rorty’s post-philosophical utopia of a democratic community seems a natural corollary to his anti-Platonism. The political entails, as if, from abandoning the divisive rationality, the language of binarisms. This presupposes deep human solidarity. Richard J. Bernstein accuses Rorty of going against his own grains and presupposing deep humanism replacing the “epistemological myth of the given”. The “historical myth” of solidarity, deep fellow feeling in envisaging a democratic community, Bernstein argues, also does not align with Dewey whom Rorty considers his academic hero. Deplete with any resistance, any political discourse, conflicting and incompatible, the radicalization of the democratic life that Dewey emphasized, in Rorty’s pragmatism, is only an “aestheticized pragmatism” of tolerant celebration of self-making, self-creation toward one’s own progress. Solidarity or “we-identity”, in the naturality of our shared habits, cultural consensus is only a benign phenomenon having “no genuine resistance, no otherness” (Bernstein 1987, p. 554). Bernstein’s criticism of the naivety of solidarity for a political program of liberal democracy is insightful in examining the discourse of knowledge and solidarity from an ethical-political angle. Inasmuch as knowledge-construction is power-nexused, the *givenness* of solidarity provides no critical stance. The naivety of methodological solidarity in replacing epistemology with social hope falls short of this goal when the ethical-political underpinnings of the exclusionary logic of western epistemology and science are not being taken into account.

The discourse of knowledge is political through and through insofar as our identities, meanings and bodies are constructed/erased in the creation of knowledge. The language of trust and cooperation cultivates the idea of tolerant epistemology in the naivety of moral expansion, but it fails to analyze the power structures anchored in the making of knowledge. In fact, solidarity too is hegemonic; plays the politics of existential-epistemic erasure inasmuch as it essentializes the other. The Western/Eurocentric academic feminism in voicing for the Third World women rather solidifies the third world difference in the normative ordering of the western, Eurocentric knowledge as *the* form of knowledge. Nevertheless, the feminist discourse also theorizes solidarity as a dissenting voice against the dominant power-nexused western epistemology and science, and equally against the western feminist scholarship about the Third World women. In what follows, the paper examines the theorization of feminist solidarity in the conceptualization of radical knowledges and pedagogies toward the emancipatory and transformative goals of knowledge and education. In surveying 25 years of the feminist epistemology project at *Hypatia*, Longino (2010) stresses moving beyond our borders and absorbing multiculturalism in reshaping the epistemological project. Theorization of trans-national solidarity as a decolonizing stance resonates this spirit to learn/unlearn the feminist position in

reshaping knowledge and education. To the transforming ideals of knowledge and education, feminist trans-national solidarity works as both a means and an end.

### **Feminist Solidarity: A Praxis**

The language of hope, utopia with uncompromising accounts of rationality and objectivity is the vision that the feminist successor science aspires for. When Haraway says, “science has been utopian and visionary from the start; that is one reason “we” need it”, she envisions hope in science, in knowledge (Haraway 1988, p. 585). However, when objectivity symbolizes transcendence, she emphatically argues that omnipotence and transcendence are not our goals; we rather want a better livable, partially shared world and not a faithful ‘real’ account of the world. Haraway aims to unmask the totalitarian narrative of science, the verbose of the representationalist epistemology of truth, the codified canonical cognitive laws, and science academia and research controlled by the few male, white elitist knowers in mustering the language of objectivity and transcendence. Taking the dominant metaphor of “vision”, she calls the science rhetoric a god’s trick, an “unregulated gluttony”, a devouring unrestricted vision “to see and not to be seen, to represent while escaping representation” (Haraway 1988, p. 581). This is equally true for the rhetoric of “truth” in the relativist and social constructivist positions.

Haraway claims that unmasking the elusive, unmarked, unembodied, unaccountable position is important because it threatens the sense of collective historical subjectivity in which the idea of feminist objectivity can be articulated. The politics of “they vs. us”, the one who can see infinitely and remain elusive, the privilege of the few elitist knowers, and the one who are not allowed not to have bodies, she argues, can be unmasked from our positioning along the various axes of race, class, gender etc. A reflective practice of understanding how our meanings, bodies get made is critical positioning, an attempt to see the making of situated agency from *below*.<sup>3</sup> Against both the totalitarian, reductionist logic of single vision and the relativistic positions of being nowhere and everywhere, Haraway sees a promise of objectivity in the knowledge from *below*, from the subjugated accounts of repression and denial. The promise of objectivity is the possibility of sustained critical and interpretive inquiry from these standpoints. Interpretation, translation, deconstruction, webbed connections, and ‘hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing’ is a chance for change and transformation (Haraway 1988, p. 588). Haraway makes it clear that feminism loves livable objectivity, “...another science: the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood” (Haraway 1988, p. 589). Critical positioning promises objectivity in partial connections, in a *stitchable* vision of a larger and objective grasp of things. She explains,

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<sup>3</sup>Talking about the marginalized communities of women in the global south and north in analyzing systematically the broader patterns of domination and exploitation, Chandra Talpade Mohanty also emphasizes attention to historical and cultural specificities in order to understand their “complex agency as situated subjects” (Mohanty 2013, p. 967).

“Subjectivity is multidimensional; so, therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. Here is the promise of objectivity: a scientific knower seeks the subject position, not of identity, but of objectivity, that is, partial connection” (Haraway 1988, p. 586).

The incompleteness of the partial connections not only promises objectivity; it also defies closure, a full grasp, a complete vision in solidifying one’s identity. Against the politics of the fullest vision, splitting of mind and body, subject and object, the epistemology of partial connections, Haraway claims, gives us visual clues, the knowledge centres/nodes to learn how meanings, bodies and our identities are created. This is to play solidarity in politics, in making webbed connections, in joining power-sensitive conversations to disrupt the politics of knowledge making, and asserting our position in it. Contrary to the politics of immediate vision, a discursive creation of isomorphic identities, the optics of webbed connections allows us to see the complex multiple inequalities ingrained in the historical and cultural materialities.<sup>4</sup> The larger, stitchable vision at once coalesces solidarity with objectivity.<sup>5</sup> Solidarity in the collective subject position, engaged in the politics of webbed connection, deconstruction, and interpretation is a dynamic critical agency subverting the totalitarian vision in the making of knowledge, meanings, and identities. Moreover, solidarity as a new metaphor of knowledge is illuminating of the power structures in the fabric of epistemology.

The theorization of solidarity as a complex, active oppositional agency or “we-identity” has also been exploited for articulating alternative insurgent knowledges and pedagogies. Solidarity is vacuous, benign without the inner dissent. The idea of feminist solidarity created in opposing all kinds of oppressions in the male/female androcentric power binary, Mohanty argues, is a vacuous conception of womanhood or universal sisterhood. Women’s identity as oppressed and exploited, devoid of an active resistance to understanding the structures of domination and power is benign. In the same vein, effacing the categories of race, class, nation and abstracting gender from its complex locatable socio-cultural, political history is benign. The creation of an isomorphic, homogenous, coherent conception of women’s identity like the third world women/women of color, devoid of active resistance is a hegemonic assertion of power. Endowing solidarity to such a homogeneous construct is a denial of agency, struggles of resistance, and a chance for transformation. Assaulting the Western/European feminism, especially the American feminist scholarship about the Third World women,

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<sup>4</sup>Against the monocular vision, Catharine A. MacKinnon similarly talks about intersectionality as a method, a distinctive stance of tracing social dynamism. She says, “intersectionality focuses awareness on people and experiences—hence, on social forces and dynamics—that, in monocular vision, are overlooked. Intersectionality fills out the Venn diagrams at points of overlap where convergence has been neglected, training its sights where vectors of inequality intersect at crossroads that have previously been at best sped through” (MacKinnon 2013, p. 1020).

<sup>5</sup>Rorty also talks about objectivity in terms of intersubjectivity or community of solidarity, but his idea pertains to the context of repudiating the mind or language-independent intrinsic reality. In Haraway, solidarity coalesces with objectivity, with critical, situated knowledges.

Mohanty argues that the discursive homogenous creation of the third world women (rather the characterization of third world difference by the same token) as historically inert, socio-politically and economically dependent, oppressed, marginal category is an essentialist identity politics, a power move. It is rather a reflexive stance of projecting the superiority of western women as secular, progressive and transforming.

In her anti-racist, anti-capitalist critique of western academia and scholarship, Mohanty theorizes solidarity as an active struggle “to construct the universal on the basis of particulars/differences” (Mohanty 2006, p. 7). In revisiting “under Western Eyes” (1986), she emphasizes that the idea of difference allows us “to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully” (Mohanty 2006, p. 226). A dialectic engagement of differences and commonalities, pluralities and universality that makes the “common differences” visible provides an analytic space for articulating methodologies of dissent, and strategizing action to combat oppressions. The idea of solidarity in the relationality of identity and difference not only subverts the modern totalizing vision of power and domination; it also subverts the politics of coopting heterogeneity, differences, and the politics of multiculturalism.

As benign variations of cultural diversity, the notion of difference serves the politics of internationalization, accommodation and commodification of education, according to Mohanty. The idea of “harmony in diversity” bypasses power, conflicts, and the threats of disruption. On the other hand, difference defined in hierarchization and domination, is not accommodative of the incommensurables. The need, therefore, is a strategic analysis of diversity and power, disrupting empty cultural pluralism as well as the vocabulary of domination. In the context of the globalized academia, particularly the U.S. academia and its higher education restructuring that sees an upsurge of various courses and programs including cooptation of black studies/ feminist studies/ ethnic studies, Mohanty criticizes the internationalization and commodification of education and stresses the need to democratize the university space for dialogue, dissent and transformation. A comparative feminist study program, for example, which is based on “add and stir” method, adding the examples of non-western or third world/south cultures, she argues, is a clear politics of flattening distance and difference. The dichotomous “us vs. them” leaves the power relations and hierarchies untouched in the way the local (the western) is connected with the global (the other non-western world). Internationalization of the feminist studies program and other programs through depoliticizing, flattening of differences makes them consumable commodities in the logic of globalism.

To combat the dominant global normative ordering of knowledge, Mohanty theorizes solidarity as “the active creation of oppositional analytic and cultural spaces” (Mohanty 2006, p. 196). Taking Jodi Dean’s idea of “reflective solidarity”, “I ask you to stand by me over and against a third”, she articulates insurgent knowledges and pedagogies of dissent in the creation of third voice/solidarity to decolonize knowledge and practice (Mohanty 2006, p. 7). As our “ideas are always communally wrought, not privately owned”, she argues the need for

“systematic politicized practices of teaching and learning” (Mohanty 2006, pp. 1, 196). Haraway holds the same view when she argues that situated knowledges are “about communities, not about isolated individuals” (Haraway 1988, p. 590). Since our experiences in any coercive hierarchy co-imply the dominator and the dominated, politicizing and developing strategies of dissent in the public/ communal sphere prevents them getting frozen into one’s personal, psychological space. Rather, engaging the opposite ideologies makes the power dynamics visible.

Talking about the comparative feminist studies/feminist solidarity model, Mohanty insists on engaging marginalized experiences, stories of struggles and resistances located in different histories of colonization in a classroom teaching practice. A relational, cross-cultural classroom environment that authorizes the third world/marginalized students’ experiences/narratives as the legitimate “objects” of knowledge is not about being sensitive and accommodative of their voices. It is to create a public, cross-cultural discourse emphasizing that our experiences are not personal; instead, they are deeply historical, colonized. This is illuminating of hierarchies of power in which the first and third worlds are co-implicated. Similarly, engaging with the experiences of race as shared experiences of certain ideologies, certain histories that define both white and black at the same time, is to prevent the social collapsing into frozen binaries of personal positions. Mohanty reinvigorates the feminist stand – “personal is political” so that an effective public discourse is created about transforming knowledges. An active public culture of dissent in the forms of pedagogies and institutional practices is important to politicize knowledge, power and experiences enabling us understand where we stand in the public realm of knowledge and education.

In a similar context of the essentialist, reductionist practices, rooted in the global politics of the central/peripheral, superior/inferior, which the feminist project itself questions, Marnia Lazreg criticizes the U.S. and Eurocentric academic feminism as conceptually and methodologically flawed; rather, there is an unwillingness to explore other than the colonized social sciences. Euro-American feminist writings about the North African and Middle Eastern women taking the ‘religious’ paradigm as the explanatory model, and representing them as the traditionalist and why they are not transformative is “a reductive, ahistorical conception of women” (Lazreg, 1988, p. 85). Lazreg argues that the concept of difference has always been a stumbling block for the Western social sciences. It is used more to understand their own institutions better than understanding the different world-view. Specifically taking the case of the western feminist writings about the Algerian women, she points out that there is an inherent contradiction in voicing for them (of course from an outsider’s perspective) and “disowning” them as entirely “different”, and hence making learning and teaching about them an impossibility. That “they are so different” from us, unprogressive, un-transforming, dominated and oppressed is a coercive optics of the dichotomous “us vs. them”. This deprives the Algerian women of their self-presence, of being, of their lived-reality, having ability to think, resist and grow. Lazreg argues, “... difference is seen as mere division. The danger of this undeveloped view lies in its verging on *indifference*. In this sense, *anything* can be said about women from other cultures as long as it appears to document their differentness from ‘us’. This bespeaks a

lack of concern for the complexity of difference as well as a simplification of difference to mean ‘particularity’, that is to say, unmediated singularity” (Lazreg 1988, p. 100).

This divisionary stance of an indifferent, unmediated singularity undermines the underlying phenomenon of intersubjectivity. That is, perceiving the “otherhood” not just as *different*, but also as having their own world like ours, according to Lazreg. Intersubjectivity, a shared consciousness in this sense provides an epistemic lens to recognize the otherhood as a distinct historical reality combating the logic of objectifying otherness. About the Algerian women, Lazreg writes, “Women’s daily activities, the rituals they performed, the games they played, their joys and sorrows constitute the foundation on which families and their reproduction were and still are based. While the contents of these acts may be different, families in other human societies have similar foundations” (1994, p. 17). Their world-view, and even their silences circumstantial, structural as well as strategic amidst the colonial conditions, are eloquent, she concedes. Providing an epistemic stance to their lives, struggles, resentment is to prevent them from being objectified. The methodology of intersubjectivity, in making sense of their concrete historical subjectivity, serves as a dehegemonizing tool against the logic of appropriation, essentializing differences that makes any comparison, any cross-cultural understanding an impossibility. Lazreg argues,

“To take intersubjectivity into consideration when studying Algerian women or other Third World women means seeing their lives as meaningful, coherent, and understandable instead of being infused ‘by us’ with doom and sorrow. It means that their lives like ‘ours’ are structured by economic, political, and cultural factors. It means that these women, like ‘us’, are engaged in the process of adjusting, often shaping, at times resisting and even transforming their environment. It means that they have their own individuality; they are ‘for themselves’ instead of being ‘for us’. An appropriation of their singular individuality to fit the generalizing categories of ‘our’ analyses is an assault on their integrity and on their identity” (Lazreg 1988, p. 98).

Differences erased by either essentializing otherness or domesticating them in homogenizing multiplicities is a coercive logic of appropriation. Intersubjectivity or intersubjective consciousness, an affirmation of cultures not being too strange, allows us to recognize otherness, which otherwise would succumb to the hegemonic binaries of first/third, north/south worlds. Differences, if not frozen, can be brought into critical perspectives through cross-cultural readings of the marginalized experiences, locations and histories. Like Mohanty, Lazreg too emphasizes engaging the local with the global, particularities with commonalities so that it is illuminative of the universal concerns such as transcultural values of freedom and social justice though not neglecting the distinct singular cultural individualities. The dialectical engagement of differences in asserting feminist solidarity is a critical stance *contra* the flattening of the differences in the coercive logic of “us vs. them”. Theorizations of solidarity in the ideas of critical positioning, common differences, and intersubjectivity in Haraway, Mohanty and Lazreg respectively radicalize the notions of the knower and knowledge in relation

to articulating social hope. The naivety of solidarity, in Rorty, as moral expansion of heterogeneity and differences, is inadequate to deal with the politics of exclusion in the project of epistemology.

## Conclusion

In changing the metaphor of “mirror” to “redescription”, Rorty’s vision of democratic society, a hope to repair social fabric damaged by the divisive foundationalist, representationalist epistemology derives from a deep trust in human solidarity. De-hierarchization and pragmatization of knowledge sought in methodological solidarity, however, is unilluminating of the ethical-political underpinnings of the production of knowledge. The idea of feminist solidarity, in crossing boundaries, in building connections provides a new metaphor of *vision* to critically engage with the questions of existential-epistemic erasure in the politics of knowledge construction. In the feminist discourse of the interwovenness of solidarity and knowledge, which overcomes the postmodern skepticism about identity and a threshold of disappearance of difference, the knower gets a chance to engage herself critically and reshape the landscape of knowledge and education.

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