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### FEMINISM IN INDONESIA AND THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MOHANTY'S "THIRD WORLD FEMINISM"

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**Abstract:** This research article presents the study about the analysis of feminism in Indonesia associated with the perspective of the term third world feminism in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essay. The condition of Indonesian feminism movement is analysed by considering the book of R.A. Kartini, meanwhile the third world feminism is analysed by considering the content of Mohanty's essay. This study employs qualitative research method. In her essay, Mohanty explores the idea of the third world feminism that has been issued by the western feminists. The terms of first world feminism, third world feminism as well as the ethnocentric have been differentiated by them. The finding of this study shows that feminism in Indonesia has a long history and has contributed to the discourse of equality as a critical project that brings social change. The feminism movements in Indonesia have already created the emancipation awareness among the people. This feminism movements have provided a proof that it needs to avoid the same generalization of the condition of feminism among the non-western countries.

**Keywords:** Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Feminism, Indonesian Feminism, Mohanty, Third World Feminism.

#### INTRODUCTION

The essay written by Chandra Talpade Mohanty which is entitled "Under

*Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*" generally discussed the issues regarding the

"Third World Feminism". Related to the term of third world feminism, it is important to discover the nature of feminism first. According to Rena (2018), the word "feminism" is naturally from a French word *féminisme*. Moreover, Cambridge dictionary defines feminism as "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way or the set of activities intended to achieve this state". The term 'feminism' itself is used to describe a cultural, political or economic movement aiming for equal rights for both women and men (Rena 2018). In addition, Kaur (2016) states that feminism is an ideology or way of thinking which seeks equality for men and women in social, economic and cultural fields. It can also be said that feminism is an ideology which particularly concerned with the issues of weaker section of our society especially women and children.

This essay discusses the view of the western feminists towards the Third World woman. Western feminists write about Third World women as a composite, singular

construction that is arbitrary and limiting. Mohanty states that these women are described in writings as victims of masculine control and of traditional culture without incorporating information about historical context and cultural differences with the Third World. This creates a dynamic where western feminism functions as the norm against which the situation in the developing world is evaluated. Mohanty was particularly critical of the production of the "Third World woman" in writings on gender and development that tended to erase historical and geographical specificity. In this essay, she alerts us to the dangers of assuming that women are a coherent group upon which social, economic, or political processes act and enabled us to produce work which engaged more seriously with the politics of knowledge production. Mohanty's primary initiative is to allow Third World women to have agency and voice within the feminist area.

In her essay, Mohanty analyses the portrayal of the "Third World Women" as presented in Western feminist works. She not only exposes

but also provides a critique of hegemonic “Western” feminisms. Mohanty detects the so-called “colonialist move” in a number of Western radical and liberal feminist writings. The practices of Western scholarship fail to visualize the heterogeneity of the Third World Women primarily because of certain assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality. Besides that, the other reason is that of inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the ‘Third World’, in the context of a world system dominated by the West.

## **METHODS**

This study employs qualitative research method. The primary sources are an essay written by Chandra Talpade Mohanty which is entitled *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, and a book by R.A. Kartini entitled “*Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang*” (*From the Dark Light Rose*). This study employs three steps in interpreting the data: describing, analysing, and deriving a conclusion. First, this study describes the framework of Mohanty’s

third world feminism. Second, this study compares Mohanty’s theory and the condition of feminism in Indonesia from Kartini’s book. Third, this study tries to derive the conclusion about third world feminism’s condition.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Feminism in Indonesia***

Regarding the Third World Development, for an instance, Gadis & Subono (2017) describes the condition of feminism in Indonesia. They say that feminism in Indonesia has a long history and has contributed to the discourse of equality as a critical project that brings social change. It is frequently accused as a proponent of western ideology or adopted from Western cultures; however, this study shows that Third World feminism stems from its own ideals and cultures. The figure of the first Indonesian feminism is **Raden Adjeng Kartini** or R.A. Kartini.

R.A. Kartini lived in colonial era. In this era, women’s activities and movements in Indonesia, both directly and indirectly, were getting more prominent due to the letters written by

Kartini, addressed to her Dutch friends (such as Mrs. Abendanon, Stella, Mrs. Ovink-Soer, etc). The compilation of her letters were printed into a book titled *Door Duisternis Tot Licht* in 1911, and later the book became very well known among Indonesian women when it was translated into the Indonesian language entitled "*Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang*" (*From the Dark Light Rose*). It seemed that the book inspired Indonesian women to fight for their esteem and dignity to be equal to men. At this point we grew to be familiar with the term "women's emancipation", and R.A Kartini herself was considered to be a feminist figure in her era (Gadis & Subono, 2017). Until now, Kartini becomes a hero in women's emancipation of Indonesia. Indonesian people commemorate her struggle every April 21<sup>st</sup> as Kartini's day because she was born at April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1879.

### ***Third World Feminism's Condition***

Mohanty uncovers *ethnocentric* (the act of judging another culture based on preconceptions that are found in values and standards of one's own culture) notions that ignore the

diversity among third world women belonging to a large geographical spectrum and critiques their grouping under the universal identity as victims. This overgeneralization is looked as the source to damage the solidarity among women by dividing them into two opposite groups. They are Western Women (universally liberated, enjoying equality, having control over their own bodies and sexuality, superior, intelligent, educated, secular, free minded) and Third World Women (universally uneducated, victimized, sexually battered, religious, family oriented, weak, powerless and domestic).

Mohanty adds her argument by bringing examples from some sources. In her writing entitled *Women of Africa: Roots of Oppression*, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli generalizes in that since all African women are economically dependent, their main source of income is prostitution. In addition, Mohanty discusses the concept of veiling in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, and India. This is looked upon as a way of sexual control over women. But evidence suggests that other than the patriarchal and religious

enforcement of veiling, there were other reasons too, like the woman who used veil as a means of solidarity with their working-class sisters in Iran during the Revolution of 1979. Furthermore, Mohanty talks about *reductionist* approach (Juliette Minces) which argued that since tribe and family are the only patriarchal social structures that a Muslim woman typically knows, the only status that she acquires in a society is that of a mother, wife or sister. Mohanty critiques Mince's view, which assumes a singular kinship system to be the effecting factor of the oppression of women and it also fails to consider the class and cultural differences that exist between these societies. This sort of worldview of women in Muslim society victimizes all Muslim women and undermines their ongoing struggles, efforts, and achievements.

In her essay, Mohanty also points out the importance of Postcolonial Feminism, critiquing what she refers to as "Eurocentric" (worldview centered on and biased towards Western civilization) assumptions. "..., it reinforces the assumption that people in the third

world just have not evolved to the extent that the West has. This mode of feminist analysis, by homogenizing and systematizing the experiences of different groups of women in these countries, erases all marginal and resistant modes of experiences" (352). Mohanty's argument demonstrates the foundation laid by Postcolonial Feminists to observe and respect differences, as opposed to overlooking them. A major component of Postcolonial Feminism is a critique of the feminist theories in developed countries. For instance, the universalizing tendencies of mainstream feminist ideas and the ways women living in non-western countries tend to be misrepresented. Mohanty unpacks this misrepresentation by invoking images of stereotypes typical in western understandings of different women in different cultures, including "the veiled woman," "the powerful mother," "the chaste virgin," and "the obedient wife." Mohanty points out that these images exist in "universal, a historical splendour." Ultimately, Mohanty posits that this causes a colonialist discourse which exercises a very specific power

in defining and maintaining existing first/third world connections.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the term third world feminism that is criticized in Mohanty's essay cannot be enforced the condition in the third world countries or developing countries. Mohanty argues that Western feminism cannot escape implication in these global economic and political frameworks and must be careful not to replicate unequal power relations between the 'First World' and 'Third World'. Since Mohanty explores her analysis regarding the view of the Western in looking at feminism in the Third World woman, therefore, she writes the big meaningful title of this essay as "Under Western Eyes".

The feminism movements in Indonesia have provided a proof that it needs to avoid the same generalization of the condition of feminism among the non-western countries. It is suggested for the further study to analyse the theory of third world feminism that is compared by considering the condition of feminism movements in other developing countries.

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