

Methodology of the Oppressed
 by Chela Sandoval
 University of Minnesota Press, 2000
 \$19.95, paperback.

Reviewed by Michael Pozo

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As with any theory, the greatest threat it faces is the inevitable exclusion (willingly or unwillingly) of some potentially polemical and destabilizing element. This has been the case with even the most liberal and inclusive approaches and studies such as Feminist and Post Modernist theories. Both have seemed relatively inept in recognizing not only the presence but also the fundamental contributions of ethnic or "minority" elements in both these fields.

In her book, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval finds a contemporary guide in what is known as "third world feminism" that not only utilizes but also unifies critical theory, cultural, gender and ethnic studies. Yet she also demonstrates the benefits such an approach will have by creating what she calls a "coalitional consciousness"(78) in order for all citizen-subjects, everywhere, to survive the Post-Modern, neo colonial world. It is by looking specifically at the influences, development and contributions of "third world feminism" alongside these other relatively segregated fields that Sandoval locates a unique and potentially liberating place for change. "Third World Feminism" recovers and implements methods of resistance developed by subjugated people under Colonial rule, slavery and oppression and combines these methods with the contemporary perspective of U.S. feminists of color, a perspective quite different from the mainly Euro/Anglo-American feminism derived from the seventies. Sandoval believes this perspective to be the starting point in which to call for a necessary mixture or *mestizaje* in the collaboration and appropriation of ideas, knowledge and theories. This idea of a mixed consciousness reflects the necessary reality of surviving as a "minority" or *other* in a dominant society by utilizing every and any aspect of the dominant power. The hope for Sandoval is that such a method and such a consciousness will be recognized by others in dissimilar fields as *the* approach towards the same goal, which is the democratization of power through active social engagement.

The most obvious (non) factor when studying the often-pessimistic topic of Post Modernism is the resistance to physical and mental oppression developed by subjugated and marginalized peoples. Their literal experience of surviving *imposed* ideas, culture and identity is not far off from the malaise Post Modernists tend to suffer from. Indeed, it is this resistance to a *dominating* culture that has its re-occurrence today in the Post Modern notions of resistance to a *dominant* culture. Sandoval explains this idea further by saying, "Under conditions of colonialization, poverty, racism, gender or sexual subordination, dominated populations are often held away from the comforts of the dominant ideology or ripped out of legitimized social narratives, in a process of power that places such constituencies in a very different position from which to view objects-in- reality than other kinds of citizen-subjects"(104). Sandoval goes on to list the manner in which such citizen-subjects resist oppression, "The skills they might develop, if they survive, have included the ability to self consciously navigate modes of dominant consciousness, learning to interrupt the 'turnstile' that alternately reveals history, as against the dominant forms of masquerade that history can take, 'focusing on each separately', applying a 'formal method of reading', cynically but also un-cynically, and not only with the hope of surviving, but with a desire to create a better world"(104). These, Sandoval claims, are the "methodology of the oppressed" which were learned, utilized and practiced by U.S. feminists of color under the description, "Third World Feminism". Sandoval goes on to demonstrate her belief in the appropriation of varied theories by boldly re-situating Frantz Fanon, Roland Barthes, Jaques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Donna Haraway as all thoroughly involved, if not contributing, to the process known as the methodology of the oppressed.

The implications and connections between political and academic struggle, as with most "minority" scholars, is ever present and always crucial in Sandoval's text. It is perhaps the answer to those who haphazardly throw the terms "tokenism" or "fad" around when concerning "minorities" of any sort, in academics in the United States. The rhetoric and methods Sandoval recovers and presents are not just a recent trend but the legacy of participation in a *living*-resistance to oppression long before theorists took pen to paper.

Methodology of the Oppressed is admirable for its clarity, argument and optimism. Sandoval handles and explains over thirty years of theory in a comprehensive manner, which most students interested in theory will savor. Chela Sandoval's text is also crucial for recognizing the possibility of resisting the malaise and impotence of Fredric Jameson's Post Modern critiques and finding hope in the acts of mind and body of the so-called hopeless. Sandoval further challenges one to examine the work of U.S. feminists of color as being at the forefront of a new, collaborative approach to liberating ideas and people both in academic discursive fields and in the world in which they are all housed.

For further interest: *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a Multiculturalist, Postcolonial, and Feminist World*. Ed. Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding. Indiana University Press, 2000.