

## The Other, Inferior

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### Abstract

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This is an essay about the category the Other/Inferior which is often used in feminist scholarship and activism, explores the epistemology and genealogy of such categorization as Absolute versus Other or duality of Self and inferior by referring to various feminist scholarly accounts and discourse by ending up the essay with a number of questions pondering in mind about whether we really need this categorization in order to recognize inequalities and injustice to challenge and address them or deconstruct the difference entirely. For decades, all social and feminist movements have sought to eliminate categorization, discrimination to create a just and equitable society based on the concept of difference, equal versus difference dichotomy. What analytical tools and frameworks we need or have at present in the absence of these categorization or binary opposition to be able to recognize and address inequalities and how we can regard things as equal if we deconstruct difference entirely? Or maybe as Chandra Mohanty suggests, continue our fight as feminist activists and scholars based on shared differences and common destinies without taking the side.

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**Keywords:** The Other, binary opposition, equal versus difference dichotomy, ethnocentric universalization

Who is the Other or Inferior? Who determines it? Are those who determine the Other remain the same or change due to which factors? Why is this category even needed? Who is involved into this categorization process of Absolute versus the Other? With these questions pondering in my mind, I am trying to study the genealogy and epistemology of the Other category, which we hear a lot today in our daily lives, as well as various accounts of feminist and sociologist scholars we study for our discipline of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies. My first scholarly encounter with *the Other* started with Simone de Beauvoir account about woman defined as *Other* (Beauvoir 1957). What Beauvoir contends is that humanity is man and man defines women relative to him and that she is not regarded as the autonomous being. For him, she is sex, and the Other and he is the Subject and the Absolute, while woman is the incidental and inessential to man's being essential. Beauvoir refers to various disciplines biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism to explore the root of this duality of the Self and the Other but does not come up with definite answer for woman's inferiority rather than women being subjugated to men throughout the history as the Other because of their anatomy and physiology, women's embodiment as main marker of their domination and oppression by men. Women's bodies are portrayed as passive receivers of the category defined by men. Beauvoir concludes that if woman continues to conform to this status quo of men being supreme than woman as the Other, it is because she fails to challenge this duality and bring about the change. The Other in Beauvoir's account defined by man varies the Other, Inferior defined by western feminism in Mohanty, Said or Hook's accounts instead of troubling this gender binary as suggested by Judith Butler in her paper about Gender Trouble (Butler 1990) and how ethnocentric western feminism maintain or reinforce the Other category which I explore more in this paper. Conversely, post structuralist feminists inspired by Michel Foucault argue that there is no universal single category of "woman" or "man" but those are socially constructed gendered subjectivities. Unlike Foucault's account about disciplinary practices that produce docile bodies (Foucault 1979), Sandra Lee Bartky argues that those practices in fact engender "docile bodies" and produce feminine bodies, "bodies which in gesture and appearance is recognizably "feminine" (Bartky 1990,p.27).

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For Bartky, the disciplinary practices and norms aim to turn women into compliant companions of men, bodies that differ from those of men's in size, gesture, movement, posture and other identificatory displays as feminine the Other. Judith Butler sheds more light on the notion of the Other with her concept of gender performativity, about how these regulatory norms and practices are being internalized and become habitual through consistent and repeated embodiment that create and maintain the duality of Object and Subject in everyday life (Butler 1988). Butler argues that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Butler 1988, p. 520) and by performative, Butler means an act that is performed repeatedly and consistently, performative acts that constitute gender. So, what becomes clear from Butler's essay is that we, as actors, perform our own Otherness but unlike the theatrical actors, we often unknowingly perform these gender difference as natural, naturalized through performative actions defined and imposed by the Object and Essential. Those refusing to conform to this sequence of performative gendered actions is also treated as the Other. The gender difference is not only enacted through the performance of acts as Butler concludes, but the category of Othering is also on continuum meaning actors performing gendered acts impose the same playscript to others and hold them accountable to this binary and categorize those subversives as the Other. Deniz Kandiyoti in her article "Bargaining with Patriarchy" talks about patriarchal relationship that not only happens between men against women but also women with power/authority and respectability such as mother-in-law in Middle East, South and East Asia areas subjugating other, younger women with less power and how this power takes cyclical nature through internalization of this form of patriarchy also by women themselves. Not only men but also women unconsciously or consciously take part in creating the duality of Self and Other towards other women as long as power is involved (Kandiyoti 1988). This discursive category of Other is in a constant continuum and is subject to change or negotiated depending on complaints and disorders of a time as Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English put it (Ehrenreich 1973). Not only our gender but also our sex creates and reinforce the duality of Object and Subject. Butler in her other essay "Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire" contends that not only gender is a social construct but that sex itself is constructed by social norms, practices, and structural arrangements. For her there is no distinction between sex and gender as both are gendered categories and emphasizes dialectic of body and mind in relation to subordination and hierarchy as mind is associated with masculinity and body with femininity (Butler 1990). The transgression of socially constructed sexuality which is predominantly heterosexual is categorized as sexual deviant, homosexual as the Other, Inferior to normative heterosexuality. In the article "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity", Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook draw attention upon everyday practices of heteronormativity that plays a central role in maintaining the gender hierarchy of men subjugating women. People who do not match between their biological sex and gender identificatory display face biased attitude and sometimes violence. "The sex/gender/sexuality system rests on the belief that there are two, opposite sexes, determined by biology" (Schilt and Westbrook 2009, p. 442). The sexually Others are also othered not only by normative heterosexuals but also in their category of sexual identities due to their race, ethnicity, social, economic and class factors. The marginalization is tense towards those of disadvantaged people of diverse sexual identities.

There is totally different encounter with the category of the Other, Inferior in Chandra Mohanty's account. Within her essay "Under Western Eyes", Mohanty critiques Western Feminism and scholarship for universalizing all women's lives and struggles in non-Western countries as victims of assumed oppression, uneducated and sexually repressed ones and by this western feminism represent themselves as a norm or reference for liberated and autonomous women. This hierarchal approach defines all women in non-western countries as the Other, or "Third World Women" category of Inferiority. According to Mohanty, Eurocentric universalization of Third World women by western feminism scholarly discourse served their interest and gain them power and superiority over the Other women and emphasizes to consider politics involved to context of subjectivity in relation to women in non-western countries, consider complexity of local situation in cross cultural feminist work rather than generalizing situation for all women (Mohanty 2003). Or the term Orientalism introduced by Edward Said in 1978 argues that West as well as colonial powers of Europe developed a discursive political and scholarly discourses that divide East and West, portrays East as the Other that is barbaric with lacking high culture and civilization as opposed to West, a system of representation of superior norms and regulations to be imposed on "uncivilized" the Other, Orient people (Abu-Lughod 2001).

This variety of the Other category such as woman defined by men as the Other or inferior, gender and sexually non -normative identities as sexually deviant or the Other defined by those of normative heterosexuals and also by homosexuals, women subjugated and marginalized by another more powerful women as the Other, those transgressing social norms and challenging the social order as the Other, women of color, Black women and women in non-Western countries perceived and defined as the Other or "Third World Women" by Western feminism and scholarship prove how power relations and patriarchy change shape and targets of domination and

oppression over time as long as power and self-interest is involved and not related to biological distinction only. Do we need the distinction of Equality versus Difference to be able to recognize the difference and react? Or deconstruct it totally? Is it even possible to live and struggle without any contradictions? What form of movement will it be if not feminism that struggles against inequality and injustice in the absence of the Other? These are the questions that constantly ponder in my mind as a feminist activist and researcher for a long time, which I have not yet found answers through my intensive work and study on gender inequality and discrimination issues. For decades, all social and feminist movements have sought to eliminate categorization, discrimination to create a just and equitable society based on the concept of difference, equal versus difference dichotomy. Deconstruct difference is still debated topic in feminist scholarship (Scott 1988) as there does not exist any theory or feminist standpoint about difference applicable to all context or circumstances regardless of temporality, locality, culture, power and political dimensions to recognize and challenge patriarchy, gender hierarchy and disparities. We discussed this question a lot during the feminist theory classes with classmates and professors about whether we need the category of difference or the Other to be able to recognize injustice and inequality. What analytical tools and frameworks we need or have at present in the absence of these categorization or binary opposition to be able to recognize and address inequalities and how we can regard things as equal if we deconstruct this dichotomy entirely that have been providing feminists or social activists and scholars with insights and choice to endorse equality. Or maybe as Mohanty suggests, continue our fight as feminist activists and scholars based on shared differences and common destinies? In either way, we must choose the side, but which side we still need to explore more.

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